





# RELEASE THAT WITCH

BOOK 12

*Er Mu*

EPUB CREATION BY LISA HAYES

# Release That Witch

(放开那个女巫)

by

Er Mu

(二目)

# Synopsis

---

Cheng Yan transmigrated only to end up in a medieval Europe like world, becoming Roland, a Royal Prince. But this world doesn't seem to be the same as his former world, despite some similarities. Witches are real and they actually can use magic?

Follow Roland's battle for the throne against his siblings. Will he be able to win, even though the king already declared him to be a hopeless case and with the worst starting situation? With his knowledge of modern technologies and the help of the witches, who are known as devils' servants and are hunted by the the Holy Church, he might have a fighting chance.

Now, let his journey begin.

# Copyright

---

All rights reserved.

English Translation by Roxerer @ [Volare Novels](#)

Translation Edits by Disco Pangolin and KitKat @ [Volare Novels](#)

ePub conversion by Lisa Hayes @ [Hasseno Blog](#)

This is a free eBook. You are free to give it away (in unmodified form) to whomever you wish.

No part of this eBook may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopying, recording or by any information storage and retrieval system, without written permission from the author.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

# Chapter 1101: The Controller of the Forest

---

It did not make sense that the forest would catch fire in spring and summer when the soil was fertilized and moist, and it was even more bizarre that more than one place was ablaze!

"Leaf?" Wendy asked.

"I don't know," Leaf replied, suddenly back to the present. "That area is beyond my control. I can't see what's exactly happening there."

"If it's really a fire, we must put it out as soon as possible to prevent it from spreading."

"I... I know," Leaf said, with a strange look on her face. She bit her lip and then answered with a nod. "Anyway, you go and look for the others. Once the emergency alarm goes off, the campsite will turn into chaos. It won't be that easy to get out of here by then."

There were not only workers on vacation at the terminus station but also their family members who had never fought at the front. It would thus be hard to evacuate the station and direct those people to shelters in an orderly manner. Leaf knew Wendy was also thinking the same thing.

"Can you... handle it by yourself?"

"Don't worry. I know what to do," Leaf assured her as she descended from the balcony. She cast Wendy one last backward glance and disappeared into the thick forest.

In a moment, the shrill, piercing alarm cracked like a whip through the air above the Misty Forest.

...

"OK, yes, I got it." Ferlin Eltek hung up the telephone at the headquarters of the General Staff at Tower Station No. 2 and

reported to Edith, "Your ladyship, there has been an accident at the western front..."

"What did you say? The northern forest is on fire?" The Pearl of the Northern Region said while knitting her brows. "Did Miss Leaf notice it first?"

"Yes, they've started to evacuate the station. The First Army stationed there is now on Alert Level 2."

"Inform the Commander-in-Chief and the other executives," Edith immediately gave her instruction after a moment of reflection. "Tell them that I'm calling a pre-war meeting."

"Pre-war meeting..." Ferlin echoed hesitantly. "Are you saying..."

"That's right," Edith confirmed Ferlin's suspicion in a grave tone. "I suspect this is the demons' new scheme."

In less than 15 minutes, all the generals of the First Army and the representatives of the Witch Union were congregated in the underground boardroom.

The Pearl of the Northern Region briefly relayed the news and then said, "The sentries at the forest terminus station have confirmed that the dark smoke did result from a fire, which is now spreading rapidly under the influence of the wind."

"Just a forest fire, no demons?" Iron Axes asked heavily.

"Not that I know of," Ferlin said while shaking his head. "The smoke blocks our view, and nobody knows what's going on there."

"Miss Sylvie, can you see anything?"

"The Misty Forest is too far away," Sylvie answered. "I have to go there personally to check out..."

"Damn it... Such bad timing," Iron Axe grumbled as he peered down at the map. "Where's the queen at the moment?"

Their original plan was that Anna and the witches would meet with the air force at the airport near the forest station and return

to Neverwinter by the "Seagull".

"They should be now on their way back on the "Black River I". After I learned that the forest was on fire, Miss Kant instructed me to tell them to change their route over the Sigil of Listening," answered Morning Light.

"Well done," Iron Axe said, a little relieved. "So only Princess Tilly and her party are there now, right?"

After Morning Light gave an affirmative answer, Iron Axe instructed him, "Tell them to take off immediately. We don't have time."

"As you command."

Iron Axe surveyed the General Staff after everything regarding the retreat was settled and then said, "Now, let me hear your opinions on this matter."

...

Leaf was perched on the top of a giant cedar, watching the thick, churning smoke in the distance.

Within an hour, the fire had gotten worse. The air was saturated with ashes and crumbs, and she could see red flickers peeping through the smog.

For a moment, she could hear the trees sob as they were being burned. Although the area on fire was beyond her control, she could sense the tremor of the Heart of Forest.

Because the Heart of Forest was a part of her.

Leaf did not tell Wendy that she was afraid.

After merging with the forest for over a year, Leaf had gradually understood the nature of her ability.

In a way, she could become immortal when every plant encompassed by the Heart of Forest became a part of her. In other words, the bigger the area she had control over, the harder it was



to wipe her off the face of the earth.

It was easy to remove a patch of grass, but it would be a lot more difficult to wipe out an entire forest or meadow.

It would be almost impossible to kill all vegetation on this planet.

Leaf remembered His Majesty had once said that plants were the foundation of nature. They would always be the earliest and the most resilient lifeform that appeared on the earth after an utter destruction of the world.

However, the problem was, the reborn Leaf would never be the same old Leaf again.

To merge with the forest, she had to memorize tons of information, including underground streams, wriggly worms beneath the ground, beehives hiding in tree trunks, and twittering birds. If this information swarmed into her head all at once, she would lose her sanity, which was exactly the reason why she had to take things slow.

Yet she knew that she could not take in so much information just on her own.

The reason she had yet to go crazy was that the Heart of Forest screened information for her. Numerous vines and roots intertwined with each other and wove themselves into a massive organic system that integrated both her magic power and memories into the forest.

This meant once the forest was destroyed, she would lose a part of her memories. Even if she did regenerate new plants, she would never be able to retrieve what had been lost.

Those could be the memory of her first acquaintance with Wendy and Scroll, of her experience at the Witch Cooperation Association with Nightingale, Mystery Moon and Lily, of her initial epic meeting with Roland, or even of the mundane routine of her everyday life in Neverwinter... She did not want to abandon any of

her memories, not even the bad ones, such as the temerity and prejudice of Cara, and the haunting search and persecution of the church.

Because this was the experience that only belonged to her. They were the evidence of her existence in this world.

She was afraid of losing them.

Her heart ached uncontrollably when she thought that the fire might spread to the fused Misty Forest.

But she could not retreat.

Because everything they had done so far was to defeat the demons and win the Battle of Divine Will.

She could not abandon her companions out of selfishness, because everybody was doing their part. She would not allow herself to fail the other fellow witches.

At these thoughts, Leaf took a deep breath. She looked up at the sky awash with sheets of pink and orange light, her arms outstretched.

In a split second, a jet of dazzling green light erupted from her chest.

"Please respond to my summon!"

At that moment, the whole forest, like an awakened giant, rose tremulously.

Numberless trees bent backward and prostrated to the ground. The earth and patches of grass underneath curled up like a carpet, producing an earth-shattering roar!

As the ground continued to shake violently, the whole Misty Forest split in half. The part controlled by the Heart of Forest gradually shrank, separating itself from the forest in the north and thereby creating a forest fire belt that stretched several hundred meters.

# Chapter 1102: The Demons' Blade (I)

---

"Based on the current information, the General Staff concludes..." Edith broke off as she tapped the desk. "The fire is very likely a diversion."

"A diversion?" Iron Axe echoed thoughtfully. "Are you saying that the enemy wasn't intending to sabotage our supply?"

"They wanted to but couldn't." Edith pointed to the map and explained, "The distance between the Taquila ruins and the north of the terminus station is over 500 miles, which is even longer than the railway on the plain. How much Red Mist do you think they would have to carry if they planned to walk to the forest, set the fire and set up an ambush? I think the Taquila witches should know that answer better than anyone else."

"They can't have such a long expedition without a continuous supply of Red Mist or outposts," Phyllis, the representative of the Taquila witches, replied. "Based on my past experience, 500 is their maximum."

"The terminus station is also a well-equipped fortress, a small stronghold, so to speak," Edith continued. "His Majesty foresaw this kind of situation a long time ago. If the demons set the forest aflame, Miss Leaf would create a fire belt to stop the fire from spreading to the station. This fire belt forms a perfect gun range, with a clear view. It would be almost suicidal if the demons attempt to pass the fortress against crossfire."

"Even if they do manage to send their army to the Misty Forest, the fire would expose their tracks," Morning Light put in. "It would be better for them to launch an attack at midnight when they can better hide their traces in the forest uncontrolled by Ms. Leaf."

"Fair enough..." Iron Axe said, nodding. "But for Sylvie, Lightning and Maggie, none of them found signs of the demons. If they have decided to attack Tower Station No. 1 again, it would

probably be too late to take actions now."

"That's another mystery we're yet to solve. Perhaps, the demons have developed a new strategy or a new weapon we've never seen to counter our scouts," Edith said flatly. "Having said that, there isn't just Tower Station No. 1. They can totally attack somewhere else as a diversion."

"Do you mean... they'll attack Tower Station No.0?"

"We're currently focused solely on the front end of the railway, so that's a possibility."

"But Station No. 0 is very far from the front. I don't think the demons have enough forces to go that far."

"Exactly," Edith affirmed.

"I see." The commander-in-chief delivered his order after a moment of contemplation. "Once the queen comes back safe and sound, the 'Blackwater River I' will travel to Tower Station No. 0, whereas the 'Blackwater River II' shall patrol the area between the Station No. 0 and the forest. The other units stay put while raising the state of alert to Alert Level 1 until the alarm is disabled. Although we reckon the demons aren't likely to attack the northern forest, it would be better to extinguish the fire as soon as possible." He then turned to Agatha and said, "Can I entrust this task to you?"

"No problem. We'll do our best," the Ice Witch replied.

"Very well. Keep patrolling the front and watching out for the Taquila front. Miss Sylvie..."

"I'll take care of it," Sylvie said with a nod.

Iron Axe clapped his hands and said, "Based on how fast the fire is currently spreading, it will reach the edge of the forest around nightfall. If the demons didn't know that Miss Leaf could actually block the fire, they should be launching an attack at sunset. We have an hour or so to remedy the situation. Let's do it!"

...

A chilly breeze played around Sylvie's cheek as she stood on the top of the watchtower at the campsite.

A swollen red sun hung low against the western mountains, diffusing a perpetual splendor. The vast meadow below was basking in a slanting beam of sunshine, gold at the far end, red interspersed with green in the middle, which actually looked like a dusky purple color under the sky, and a deep navy, the color of night, at the near end.

This was probably a scene that she could only see on the boundless Barbarian Land.

It was also a final countdown to the war.

The demons were approaching them at this very moment as the sun gradually sank behind the forest.

The beautiful scene thus appeared to be a little bleak and desolate.

Sylvie turned around and gazed upon the southwestern sky. Although she could not see the Misty Forest from here with her Eye of Magic, she still, from time to time, cast a glance in that direction. Dimly, she apprehended that something would happen there.

The General Staff's decision and Iron Axe's order were at least carefully contemplated if not impeccable. The demons could not stretch too thin without a constant supply of Red Mist. If they did aim at the terminus station near the forest and Tower Station No. 0, the garrison there would have enough time before the reinforcements arrived. Beyond a doubt, the demons would still send most of their forces to the railway.

However, why was she still worried so much?

Sylvie shook her head, trying to put these thoughts out of her mind. She was about to take another look at the frontline when

suddenly, a speck of light came into her sight.

"Light?"

"How come..."

Eyes widened, she looked in the direction of the light — it was a cluster of bright red flames streaking toward the south.

Sylvie wondered if this was her illusion.

As far as she knew, the Eye of Magic could not see things so far away.

Sylvie took another look, and her theory was confirmed by a black vision field. The Eye of Magic would fail to see through solid matters if the object was beyond its vision scope. As the lighting was poor, she could hardly discern the edge of the forest. All she saw was a pitch-dark blackness, against which gleamed the flashy fleck.

Sylvie wondered what that thing was.

Suddenly, she sensed a chill running down her spine and shuddered uncontrollably.

She knew what she had been worried about now.

It was something everybody had overlooked.

She saw magic power!

And it was enormous!

The Magic Eye could not see things very far away. However, when it encountered a powerful magic source, it would sense external vibrations and thus "saw" what it could not normally see, just as people sensed sunlight through closed eyelids.

How incredible that magic power must be if she could sense it from here!

The Cursing Demon.

This was the name that flashed across Sylvie's mind.

It was the manlike demon in Taquila, the commander of the demons. Usually, a commander of an army rarely participated in a battle himself, as his main duty was supervision.

Nevertheless, this commander was also a powerful Senior Demon with an extraordinary fighting capacity.

Now, the red dot was accelerating, almost as fast as Maggie in the form of a Devilbeast.

Their target had been Leaf from the beginning!

"Run... now..." Sylvie could not help yelling. "Run, Leaf!"

# Chapter 1103: The Demons' Blade (II)

---

But Leaf could not hear her from so far away.

The red dot zoomed even faster and became brighter as well.

What should she do?

"Right, right... telephone! I can call Leaf!"

Sylvie slid down the pole into the underground boardroom and yelled at Morning Light, "Call Leaf, now, and tell her to run!"

Realizing something serious had happened, Ferlin immediately picked up the receiver without further questions. He asked, "Run... where?"

"Anywhere! Neverwinter, the south of the forest... as far away as possible from the terminus station!"

All the people in the boardroom rested their eyes on Sylvie.

"Have you found anything?" Edith asked.

"We were all wrong. The demons' real target is Leaf, Leaf only!" Sylvie looked toward the southwest restlessly and said, "Leaf needs to concentrate to control the forest. When she does so, she turns into a physical entity, and the demons would be able to see the flow of her magic power and thus locate her! They burned the forest just to flush her out!"

"What?" Edith asked, her brows furrowed. "Can you actually see the demons from here?"

"Yes, because they're... too powerful," she muttered.

"But Ms. Leaf is powerful too," Ferlin cut in. "If the forest wasn't on fire, she could have rivaled an army of Mad Demons."

"There must be something else we haven't anticipated..." Sylvie said as she made her hand into a fist. She saw the red dot rise rapidly like a provoked serpent. "Has it got through yet?"



"No... nobody is picking up the phone."

It appeared that Leaf had been completely diverted by the fire. If they did not do anything right now, the red dot would reach the forest in one or two minutes!

"Call the terminus station," Edith ordered. "Let the First Army stationed there notify Leaf and also tell them to support her."

"OK." Ferlin thus turned to another telephone.

While they were waiting in agitation, Sylvie saw the red light pass the treetops and plummet like a sinister shooting star.

"Is it planning to break through the defense directly from above?"

Sylvie somehow thought of the worst scenario.

It was probably — a Magic Slayer!

...

Leaf clapped her hands and heaved a sigh of relief. "It should be fine now," thought she.

The trees at the edge of the campsite were now completely separated from the north. The fire would no longer pose a threat to the terminus station by any means.

Nevertheless, she still felt sorrowful for the burned, smoldered trees.

How many memories would she lose if the forest under her control was ablaze? How much precious, important experience would thus sink into oblivion?

Leaf could not bear the prospective loss.

"Cheer up, Leaf!" she encouraged herself in silence.

"You need to help quench the fire later!"

She was about to look around the campsite to see if there was anything she could help when suddenly, a whistling sound in the sky caught her attention.

Leaf gazed up. It was almost nighttime. The sky was a bruised purple, and it was hard for her to discern what that thing was.

"Watch out! Run!" someone shouted behind her.

Having no time to see who that was, Leaf disappeared into the trees immediately. At the same time, a shadow dived to the ground and brushed past her. The leaves and twigs around it were instantly pulverized into dust.

Instead of producing a loud noise, the shadow landed quietly. Leaf felt a lurch of fear. Before she could react to the attack, the air rippled around the shadow.

Her flowing magic power froze in a second.

Then it cracked like a mirror!

"Ah———"

Leaf was pushed out of the tree trunk by an immense force and sped backward in a swirling color.

She fell heavily on the ground and coughed out blood.

Then she saw what the shadow really was.

It was a tall demon with pretty sharp facial features. Other than its deep blue skin and strange clothing, it looked no different than a normal human being. However, its mere presence made Leaf's chest constrict.

The air seemed to become thick and unbreathable.

Leaf straightened up breathlessly. She mustered all her strength to summon the forest, but the forest was unresponsive.

It was not her first time to be forced out of the Heart of Forest.

"Magic Slayer..." she murmured, her heart sinking to the bottom.

The Magic Slayer did not sneer or howl. It simply stretched out its sharp-clawed hands and lunged at her.

Leaf closed her eyes in despair.

But she did not feel the anticipated pain.

"Clink!"

A huge, strange-looking sword appeared and blocked the blow. Leaf could never forget the signature giant blade and the golden sun mark on the sword.

"Envoy Ashes."

"I'm your rival, monster!" Ashes yelled as she escaped the clutch of the Magic Slayer and stood magnificently before Leaf.

"A-Ashes?" Leaf exclaimed in surprise and stared at her. "Didn't you return to Neverwinter with Princess Tilly? I saw you board the 'Seagull'—"

"Yeah, that was our original plan," Ashes replied without giving her a backward glance. "but I feel there's something out of character in this fire, so I requested to stay here, just in case something happens."

"So it was her that warned me earlier."

"This is the Magic Slayer you encountered the other day?"

"Yes, but you have to be careful. It's much stronger than that Senior Demon!"

"I've noticed that," Ashes said, with the giant sword in front of her. "Don't worry. I may not win, but I can earn us some time before reinforcements arrives."

The Magic Slayer swept over the encampment with a contemptuous glance and stared at the two witches coolly. "Are you... an Extraordinary?"

To their great astonishment, it was speaking the human language, although its pronunciation was a bit off. This was even more incredible than the appearance of the Magic Slayer itself!

During the previous Battles of Divine Will, demons and witches had never communicated with each other!

"Can you... speak our language?" Leaf could not help asking.

"Learning is the first step of evolution. Only you guys will be surprised at our progress," the Senior Demon replied as it spread out its hand. "Thousands of things changed in the past hundreds of years, but you still live in the old way. Demons, Extraordinaries, even these titles remain the same. That's really... pathetic."

"What did you say?" Ashes snarled.

But the demon did not respond to her. Instead, it conjured a gust of wind.

Ashes took a few steps forward and flailed the giant sword in her hand. The magic cyclone dissipated under the influence of the God's Stone of Retaliation, but the Magic Slayer was already gone.

# Chapter 1104: The Demons' Blade (III)

---

"Ah — " Leaf's scream suddenly came from behind.

Ashes turned around and found the wind did not disappear but only weakened. It sent Leaf flying into the air.

At the same time, the Magic Slayer materialized behind her.

"How... is that possible?"

The cyclone should be a form of magic power, and it did not make sense that the God's Stone of Retaliation had failed to block it.

Ashes could not afford to give it much thought. She aimed the sword at her opponent's neck.

However, the demon blocked her strike with one single hand. At this point, Ashes clearly saw its arm emanate blue light.

The Magic Slayer did not spare her another glance before he conjured another wisp of wind that made Leaf drift even farther.

"It's... picking on Leaf only!"

Ashes followed at its heels, but the Magic Slayer managed to keep her at a distance. Leaf attempted to fight back, but the Magic Slayer pinned her down with a wave. Not able to concentrate her mind and summon her power, Leaf became utterly defenseless under the firm clutch of her enemy.

"Is this how a Senior Demon controls its power?" thought Ashes, her palms starting to sweat. It not only subdued Leaf but also deflected her attack effortlessly. If she could not keep pace with the demon, the demon would probably kill Leaf in the end.

Ashes had never been so strained before.

"Faster, just a little faster!"

For the past two years, Ashes had been following Taquila witches'

training routine and noticed a drastic change in her physique. Her magic power increased and her body was well nourished by the magic. Sometimes, she even had a feeling that her magic power was gradually taking place of her flesh and blood.

Yet this was not enough.

She must move faster to save Leaf.

And protect the people she wanted to protect.

Ashes concentrated her mind to summon her power. During the holy duel with Lorgar, she had discovered a unique combat technique, which was to direct all her power to a specific body part to strengthen and enhance it. This was also the reason why the wolf girl could transform her each limb separately.

Since the Magic Slayer was not paying particular attention to Ashes, Ashes could focus her mind. As the surrounding magic power was in disarray, she could sense the flow of the magic power in her body more acutely.

After the demon distanced itself from Ashes for the fourth time, Ashes was around 20 meters behind. The demon brushed away the vines conjured by Leaf and attempted to snatch her by the chest.

It seemed that Leaf was doomed.

However, at this very moment, Ashes mustered all her strength and kicked at a big tree!

For a split second, her hand touched something.

She streaked at the Magic Slayer like a bolt of lightning. Time appeared to have stopped. She could almost "see" the crushed tree crumple underneath her kick, its twigs and branches flying in midair and slumping heavily on the grass.

The Magic Slayer, for the first time, stopped and used its arms to block her strike.

"WHAM! BANG!"

The Magic Slayer was thrown into the air. It flew through the air several meters and performed a double somersault before it landed on the ground.

In the meantime, Ashes caught falling Leaf and blocked further attacks from the demon.

"Hmm..." The Magic Slayer raised its brows and, for the first time, showed some interest.

"Fire!"

Just then, the reinforcement Ashes had been waiting for finally arrived. The God's Punishment Witches stationed at the terminus station jumped out of the bushes and aimed their grapeshot guns at the demon. Thunderous roars pierced the air above the forest. As bullets hailed down, the demon flitted from tree to tree like a fleeting ghost to dodge shells. In the midst of flying tree bark and crumbs, its blue light flickered.

A short way farther on, there came a ruffling of footsteps. Apparently, the First Army had surrounded the forest.

The demon cast Ashes one last glance and leaped off. With a surge of magic power, it soared into the sky and vanished into the darkness.

"Damn it," the leading God's Punishment Witch spat. She crouched down in front of Ashes and asked, "I'm Elena. Are you OK?"

"I'm fine." Ashes answered while looking at half-unconscious Leaf. She wiped the blood off Leaf's face and said, "But she needs treatment."

"Rest assured," Elena said. "Miss Nana and Miss Nightfall are on their way."

...

As soon as the Upgraded descended to the ground, a junior guard

greeted him.

"Sir Ursrook, your air tank."

Before the guard finished, Ursrook snatched the tank from him and inhaled deeply.

"Awh——"

After a long silence, Ursrook handed the tank to the guard and said, "Get a new one for me."

"Yes, sir."

The guard took out the old tank and implanted a new one in his spine. This was a more convenient and faster way to breathe as it did not require armor for transporation.

"How about your trip..."

"Had a little problem, but I anticipated that earlier," Ursrook replied expressionlessly. "That's men's territory. If I couldn't even deal with that, I would doubt about Kabradhabi's loyalty."

"No, that wasn't your real power," the guard defended his master hotly. "The air tank limited your power. If you were around the Birth Tower, those low lives would have been no match for you, sir!"

Summoning magic power would significantly reduce a Senior Demon's health points. To maintain a certain number of health points for a safe return, he had to reserve some of his power when combatting with the witches.

"I was just planning to bait the hook this time. Next time, I'll pick a place more favorable to us for a fair duel," Ursrook looked in the direction of the southern forest and mumbled, "A place for their perpetual rest..."

"If only the Sky Lord could give you more support," the guard complained indignantly. "In that case, you don't have to risk yourself, and the Birth Tower in Taquila..."



"Risk myself?" Ursrook interjected, "I actually feel it quite interesting. I prefer to go check myself rather than simply relying on others' reports." He dug a deformed steel bead out of his armor and studied it attentively. "The awakened females haven't improved a bit, but the males, who used to have no magic power, are now somewhat different. It turns out that human beings aren't completely useless... If only I could get to know more about them."

The guard did not reply but looked apparently disapproving.

Ursrook put the steel bead in his inner pocket airily and continued, "As for the lord... I believe he must have done his best. It's just that the king has his own problems and considerations. We don't need to be too frustrated about it. After all, our ultimate goal is to reach a higher realm, and that's the reason we fight, isn't it?"

"Yes... you're right," the guard muttered while bowing his head.

"Let's retreat, and take the 'tombstone'. It's a long journey to Taquila," Ursrook instructed as he slowly rose into the air and turned in the direction of the ruins. "Now, we've set the hook. We're just going to wait for the fish."

"Until it's time to haul in our net."

"We'll surely meet again one day."

# Chapter 1105: Leaf's Heart

---

Two days later.

In Neverwinter, Graycastle.

"That was about the situation at that time..." Ashes shared the details of her encounter with the demon. "After the fire was extinguished, Lightning found the enemy's traces around 100 kilometers away in the north. Those traces should be left by the Spider Demons when they crossed the forest. I fancy there were just three or four of them."

Because of the interruption of the signals, Roland did not know that Leaf had been under attack until evening. The early next morning, he immediately instructed Tilly and Wendy to fly to the terminus station and bring her back to Neverwinter.

Ashes only suffered minor injuries but Leaf had been helped off the plane.

Fortunately, Nightfall had grown the Seed of Symbiosis in Leaf's body. While Leaf remained unconscious, her symbiont seemed to be fine. This meant the impact on her was more mental than physical.

Roland, in the meantime, turned to a big map on his desk.

He had already formed a vivid picture of the incident in his mind.

The demon commander had noticed something unusual about the Misty Forest. It noticed that the railway took a turn at the forest and stretched on toward Taquila. Instead of forcing through the trench and the barbed wire at the terminus station, it had directly attacked the witch who controlled the forest.

Meanwhile, a group of demons had traveled nearly 500 kilometers from the Taquila ruins to the northern forest. The Spider Demons had not only set the forest on fire but had also been supplying the Red Mist to their army. This was, therefore, in a

sense, the demons' first guerrilla operation.

The fire was just a diversion. The demons had probably foreseen that the forest controller would stay in the forest, watching the unfolding of the event. They did not really care about whether the First Army would put out the fire or not.

Perhaps, they had come to realize that Leaf was the supply hub for the First Army.

The demons were obviously under the impression that once the forest controller was killed, human beings would immediately retreat from the front.

Although their speculation was not completely accurate, it did demonstrate how proficient the demons were in using magic power. They had not only figured out the form of Leaf's magic power but also made a specific plan to eliminate her. Everything was carefully calculated, from their traveling distance to the time required to retreat. Only with a profound comprehension of magic power could they successfully carry out this operation.

Roland even suspected that the demons had seen something similar to Leaf's ability.

It would take at least a week for the demons to backtrack, so it was not very hard to trace them down. Nevertheless, there was no point in doing so, because the Magic Slayer could fly away anytime. If with luck, they could probably kill a few Spider Demons or some lower demons during this pursuit. If worse, they would probably suffer an even greater loss.

There was no effective measure to counter the demons in this case due to the secrecy of their operation. Although most of the witches were under the protection of the God's Punishment Witches, the situation did not apply to the witches who moved around like Leaf, Maggie and Lightning. Fortunately, very few Senior Demons were as powerful as the Magic Slayer, so Leaf, Maggie and Lightning would notice any change in magic power if a

regular Senior Demon was about to attack. In that case, they simply needed to retreat immediately to avoid a direct confrontation.

Another thing that concerned Roland was the conversation between the Magic Slayer and Ashes.

He did not anticipate that the demons could speak the human language.

Being a Senior Demon, Kabradhabi did not have the ability to directly communicate with human beings. Camilla had to channel it to build effective communication.

"Learning is the first step of evolution."

"Thousands of things have changed in the past hundreds of years, but you still live in the old way."

"It's rumored that long before the beginning of the first Battle of Divine Will, a man taught the demons his knowledge."

Ashes' and Pasha's words reverberated in Roland's mind.

For some reason, Roland had the impression that the Magic Slayer took pride in the past hundreds of years, as though he had witnessed those numerous changes himself.

Could he be a demon who had lived back in the Union Age?

That was why he had learned the human language?

But this was too unbelievable!

While Roland was absorbed in his thoughts, Wendy's voice came from outside the office.

"Your Majesty," she said as she pushed the door open, "Leaf just woke up."

"I'm coming," Roland replied as he stood up abruptly and turned to Ashes. "Do you want to come along?"

The Extraordinary nodded.

"By the way," He stopped when he had almost reached the door, "I forgot to 'thank you'."

Although Ashes seemed uninjured, it did not mean she was totally fine. Roland did notice several shallow cuts on her face and knuckles.

The wind that had blown Leaf away was definitely not a gentle breeze. Normally, Extraordinaries could heal themselves within one day, but apparently, these cuts were not easy to heal.

In other words, the injury could have been fatal had she made a single mistake during the fight.

The battle was obviously not as simple as Ashes had described.

Ashes remained expressionless. She simply gave Roland a downcast glance with her golden eyes and said, "Take care of Tilly."

"Naturally..." Roland said, pursing his lips. He knew Ashes had just done what a reasonable person would normally do in that situation. He was surprised that a blunt person like Ashes would one day also become quite sensitive. Roland returned her a smile and said, "Let's go."

...

By the time they arrived at Leaf's bedroom, the room was packed with visitors.

Almost all the witches who had joined the Witch Union at the same time as Leaf, including Anna, Nightingale, Tilly, Scroll, Mystery Moon, etc., were there. The group instantly parted to let Roland through.

Over the heads of the group of the witches, he saw Leaf sitting up in her bed.

She looked wan, her bright green hair disheveled, but she did not look particularly distraught.

Her eyes were still bright and sparkly.

"Your Majesty," Leaf spoke in a low voice, "Sorry to have you come down here."

"I'm glad you're OK..." Roland said in relief, realizing that her coma was mainly due to fatigue. Nonetheless, deep down inside, Roland knew Leaf sustained more serious injuries than what could be seen. She was hexed with the same "curse" put on Lightning. Her connection with the Heart of Forest had been forcibly interrupted, and she had barely survived the attack. Roland said, "Ashes told me everything. Take a good rest and leave the forest to us. As for your injuries, we'll manage..."

Leaf shook her head and replied, "No, Your Majesty, please let me return to the front."

"Leaf!" Nightingale exclaimed.

"I know everybody is concerned about me, but staying in bed won't be of much help, will it?" Leaf pronounced each syllable clearly and slowly. "The curse would not disappear anyway, no matter whether I'm in the Misty Forest or Neverwinter. So, there's no reason for me to stay here."

"But..." Wendy protested in a hushed voice.

"If I return to the forest, I can keep the communication between the front and Neverwinter going. The testing field would be also able to continue its operation. I can also help with the delivery of supplies to the front. Although not much, I can at least do something to help defeat the demons. You all know which one is a better choice, right?" Leaf broke off, a little breathless, before forcing a smile. "Don't worry. Next time when I see something unusual, I'll run as fast as I can."

Nobody spoke for a short moment.

Roland took a deep breath. He had foreseen this would happen. If Leaf could be that easily persuaded, she would not have been able

to successfully bring her fellow witches from the Impassable Mountain Range to the Border Town barefoot.

Like the forest, she was gentle on the outside but tough on the inside.

"I see," Roland spoke at long last. "But you have to promise me that nobody will act alone under any circumstances before the Magic Slayer with the evil cursing power is killed."

With these words, he turned to Ashes and asked, "Can you take care of her for the time being?"

Ashes exchanged a look with Tilly and then replied curtly, "Sure, leave her to me."

# Chapter 1106: A Universal Strategy

---

After returning to the residential area of the Sleeping Spell, Ashes heard Tilly cough behind her when she attempted to shut the door.

"Ahem, do you understand what Roland meant by 'taking care of her'?"

A smile curling her lips, Ashes pretended she did not understand the implied meaning and asked, "Don't I just need to be with Leaf and attend to her needs like people would normally do to take care of a patient? Leaf's hurt, so she'll need a lot of help..."

"Oi!"

Ashes could not hold her face any longer.

"Oh, you were teasing me..."

"Don't worry. I know what I should do," Ashes answered as she turned around and blinked at Tilly. "His Majesty wants me to stay alert for any fluctuations of magic power so as to warn Leaf beforehand when something happens — just like how you and I met."

"If I didn't have this ability, you probably would never have noticed me, who was so wretched and lost back then," Ashes thought.

"I'm not a demon," Tilly protested a little defiantly while folding her arms.

"Just an example," Ashes said, waving her hand airily. "Because I'm the only person who has fought the Magic Slayer."

"What about after?"

"Find reinforcements of course, and repel the enemy together."

"Really?"



"Unlike Princess Lorgar, I'm not keen on duels," Ashes said with a smile. "As long as her magic power isn't interrupted, Leaf could cross the forest in a second, so there's no point for me to remain at my post."

Tilly breathed out a sigh and said, "Don't forget what you just said."

"Of course not," Ashes said as she walked to Tilly and looked straight into her eyes. "I'm going to stay with you for a very long time. Andrea is a lady who has never taken care of people. She only cares about how to fight. How can I entrust you to her?"

"O-Oi, shut up!" Tilly snapped, shooting Ashes a cool stare, and stormed into the room, a little irritated.

When Tilly almost gained the room, she suddenly stopped and muttered, "I'm glad... that you saved Leaf."

Ashes was mildly surprised.

"It would be such a waste if you just protect me." Tilly turned around and said, "Although you always say the best for me is to return to Sleeping Island, you actually do like it here, right? Now, you smile more often than you used to."

"R-really?" Ashes wondered, her hands uncontrollably rubbing on her cheeks.

"To be honest, you rarely smiled on Sleeping Island either. You always had a long face like you were ready to leave for a battle," Tilly continued. "Perhaps, you haven't realized that the new witches are all afraid of you. Only a girl like Maggie who's slow at guessing what people are thinking isn't scared to befriend you."

"But now, you not only get along well with the Witch Union but have also got an admirer, if I'm correct?"

"Are you referring to... Lorgar? No, we're just friends, probably because we often train together..."

"Alright then," Tilly interjected. " Compared to the 'avenger' you, I prefer the current you, but..." she paused for a second and said, "this doesn't mean you're allowed to pick on an individual fight rashly with the demons without thinking about the possible consequences. Do you understand?"

After a moment of silence, Ashes replied, "Yes."

"Very good." Tilly nodded in satisfaction and said, "Perhaps in the near future, I'll fight with you on the battlefield together."

"Oh, any progress on the plan of the Aerial Knight?"

"Roland says he's trying to use a brand new engine on the glider. If successful, he might be able to create a new type of plane that doesn't require Wendy's ability," Tilly said in excitement. "However, he has to first create a plane tailored to my need. It's probably going to fly even faster and higher than the Devilbeasts!"

"His Majesty would never allow you to partake in the war in person. Plus... he already made a promise to me," Ashes smiled, leaving her words unsaid. "I'll watch you test it out."

"Sounds good. I'm going to take a shower. I'm all sweaty after flying the 'Seagull' all day. See you later."

"Not together?"

"Absolutely not!" With these words, Tilly slammed the door.

Ashes sat down on the recliner in the living room, looking attentively at her palm.

She still remembered the feeling when she had swung the sword at the demon.

At that time, she had suddenly entered a new realm. Although it was just for a split second, the lingering memory persisted.

She felt everything, including her vision, thoughts and movements, had temporarily deserted the world around her, except for her magic power. The intense magic power seared

through her body, making her feel invincible.

Ashes even had a feeling that her power was speaking to her invitingly, tempting her to go even further.

"Magic power doesn't only affect our physique but also our character. If we plan to use our magic power to achieve something, it would guide us in the desired direction."

"So what exactly... are you fighting for?"

Ashes remembered what Phyllis, the God's Punishment Witch, had said to her the first time they had marched for the war.

"Why are you telling me this?"

"Because you're an Extraordinary. You were born with incredible potential. However, you have to have an achievable goal and a strong will in order to go beyond your limit."

"As far as I know, all the Transcendents in the Union upgraded in battles, and those who couldn't successfully become Transcendents were all eventually killed by the demons. I hope you won't become one of them."

"Did the Transcendents... as well as the Three Chiefs of the Union also face the same decision at one point?" Ashes asked herself.

She clenched her fist.

At that moment, she dimly understood what she should do.

...

Roland returned to the office and called the headquarters of the Administrative Office.

"Please connect me to Barov."

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

Immediately, he heard Barov's voice on the other end of the line. Barov asked, "How can I help you, Your Majesty?"

"When is the upcoming exam for elementary school?"

"Let me see... Based on the schedule, it'll be next week, and there will be roughly 2,650 students sitting the exam."

The schedule seemed to fit Roland's plan. Roland thought for a while and instructed Barov, "Draft a recruitment proposal for me. I need someone to help with my new project. For now, I probably need about 500 people."

"As you command."

The current Neverwinter was like a giant melting pot where people from all over the country came to receive primary education before being assigned to different posts. Experienced production line workers took in new workers and taught them techniques and knowledge. As workshops gradually diminished, those personal techniques transformed into public knowledge and further became a part of the system. It was thus natural for experienced workers to train newbies. Once the newbies became experienced, they were able to take in more trainees, and the industry expanded.

Neverwinter had currently created a virtuous cycle after years of development. When the population of the city reached a certain number and when resources were abundant, people would see the amazing power brought about by the rapid industrialization.

After hanging up the telephone, Roland took out a stack of paper from a drawer.

Ever since the night attack at Tower Station No. 1, he had been working on a "universal strategy". Most of the research materials were collected from the Dream World. Now what he needed to do was to localize his plan based on the situation in Neverwinter. Roland found there was one type of weapon that would suit Neverwinter's current need.

"Do you have a new idea again?" Nightingale asked as she

revealed herself from the Mist.

"Ah, yes..." Roland quickly went over the stash, stopped at one certain page and said, "Yes, that's it."

# Chapter 1107: Yes! RPG

---

"Hmm... It looks like a large bamboo stick," Nightingale commented as she drew closer. "What's that called?"

"RPG's..." Roland broke off while curling his lips, "ancestor."

"R—P—G..." Nightingale repeated the mouthful word strenuously and said, "Such a weird name. Is it a code name or something? In memory of the person who invented this weapon?"

Roland shook his head in amusement and explained, "It has many names and various forms in the Dream World, but this is the most popular one. It's getting so popular that a religion has formed around it, which is called the RPG Religion."

"Like the legendary double swords that saved and destroyed the world?" Nightingale asked, her voice alive with curiosity. "Is it that powerful?"

The double swords that had saved and destroyed the world was a hallow recorded in an epic poem passed down among the ancient witches. There had been an organization prior to the first Battle of Divine Will who had looked for this hallow fervently. Although it was just a distant legend, RPGs and the double swords shared some similarities.

"You can say that about modern RPGs, but not its ancestor," Roland said. As a type of rocket launcher, modern RPGs definitely contributed a lot to the peace of the world.

"But you can't just skip RPGs and go directly to modern RPGs. You have to create its ancestor first and slowly work on it, right?" Nightingale asked, with a look of dawning comprehension in her eyes.

"Exactly." Roland was pleased with her quick response. After staying with Roland for so many years, Nightingale could finally keep up with him. Roland complimented, "You grasp the nature of

the problem quite fast."

"Of course. I do improve, don't you think so?" Nightingale thrust a piece of dried fish with an air of triumph and said, "Sometimes you'll talk about terms like the Black Ribbon and Madames. Aren't they the evolved forms of 'glider' and 'concrete ship'? I've actually learned a lot from you over the past few years."

"Ahem..." Roland coughed. "Forget about them."

Roland noticed that both the battle at Northbound Slope and the night attack at Tower Station No. 1 had the same problem, that was, regular soldiers were too weak to confront the Senior Demons. According to the information collected by the Union, there were various types of Senior Demons with different abilities. Those abilities were pretty random with no specific pattern. However, it appeared all the Senior Demons could shield themselves from external harm with their magic power.

Perhaps, this universal shielding ability was just a coincidence, or simply a result of the natural evolution after decades of fighting and upgrading. Demons who did not possess such a shielding ability were naturally obliterated over the course of time. Nevertheless, Roland would still need to make a plan based on the worst scenario.

The demons' shielding ability was very similar to Shavi's. However, it could only protect the demons from physical injuries and it had a limit. If the demons stood right in front of a shooting unit and were shot multiple times, they would die in a few seconds.

Nevertheless, the demons would never let the soldiers to shoot them unscrupulously in a real battle.

Suppose the infantry of the First Army attacked a Senior Demon, the latter would immediately hide or fight back. In neither case would the First Army gain advantages.

The God's Punishment Witches were designed to repel the Senior

Demons, since they were not only as powerful as Extraordinaries but could also block attacks. Unfortunately, the Senior Demons appeared to have lost their superior status over the past hundred years and participated in battles more often. If that was the case, the 300 God's Punishment Witches would probably not be enough to kill all the Senior Demons.

Therefore, Roland had to improve their weapons.

RPG, also known as Rocket Propelled Grenade, sounded like a very promising idea, but it was impossible to create such a legendary weapon in a short period of time in Neverwinter. Even its simplest model, a rocket launcher, was quite technologically demanding, which required a power system consisting of fuels and a combustor, and Roland did not want Anna to produce and test the weapon.

He thus decided to invent a grenade without a launcher instead.

That was the prototype of an RPG, a recoilless grenade.

The most famous model was the Panzerfaust.

Although most people generally referred to these types of weapons as rocket launchers, they actually belonged to two separate categories. A rocket launcher was a weapon ejecting projectiles. It was normally equipped with a power source and could operate on its own without a barrel. For example, the well-known 107mm rocket launcher could be easily ignited by dry batteries and had a fairly decent firing rate as well.

The Panzerfaust and RPG were recoilless guns that required a barrel to provide a thrusting force. If they were ignited without a barrel, they would only spin around on the ground. An RPG, particularly, relied on a rocket to increase its shooting range and accuracy. Its thrusting force would mainly be fueled by gunpowder.

The Panzerfaust, on the other hand, was famous for its extremely



simple structure compared to its various successors. Its barrel was a cylinder, its head made of iron shards. The gunpowder was black powder great for mass production.

Nevertheless, Roland was not planning to completely copy the Panzerfaust. The biggest drawbacks of the Panfauster were its short shooting range, low accuracy rate and limited impact. These drawbacks were unacceptable in a mass warfare like this. As Roland constantly learned from history, he knew that some small adjustments must be made to improve the weapons.

For instance, he had to install a gourd-shaped CD nozzle at the rear of the barrel and thus transformed the subsonic ammunition into a supersonic one. In this way, he would be able to increase the counter-recoil force and thereby the shooting range of the weapon.

The barrel needed to be equipped with a handle, a scope and a wooden casing to further improve the accuracy rate and make it more user-friendly.

The missile could be further stabilized with an empennage made of mild steel, which would spread open and spin with the missile when it was in the air.

Roland was also thinking about shaping the front part of the missile into an inverted hollow cone to direct the energy to one point, making it highly explosive and armor-piercing. In this way, he could maximize the impact of the grenade on the Magic Barrier.

These upgrades were all doable with the current technologies available in Neverwinter.

Roland folded the drawing sheet and walked to the French Window.

He knew the First Army would still not a stand chance at repulsing the Senior Demons when equipped with grenades, but they would at least have something to compete against them. Even though the demons were fast, high-explosive anti-tank warheads

could still be fatal. Once the demons were hit, the outcome of this war might be very different.

This would mean that any regular soldier would have the capability to kill a Senior Demon with just a bit of training. With such advanced weapons, the infantry unit would also be able to tackle armored demons such as the Spider Demons and the Giant Skeleton. To make this weapon, he only needed some gunpowder and a half slice of an ingot.

Roland thought this was a really good deal.

# Chapter 1108: More than Enough

---

...

Joe sat crossed legged on the floor, staring at the seven crooked lines next to him in a daze.

This was how he enumerated the number of days he had been here.

For every day that had passed, he would dig a line in the ground. It had now been seven days.

Joe did not want to think about whether Farrina was still alive or whether Lorenzo was still torturing her. His heart ached every time these questions came floating into his mind.

Joe started to wonder if he had made the wrong choice.

Sean had indeed promised him to send the message to the King of Graycastle. He also treated Joe fairly well. However, Graycastle was, after all, too far away from the Kingdom of Wolfheart. It would take at least a month for the King of Graycastle to receive the message, make a decision and send his troops to the Kingdom Wolfheart, and probably even longer if he was to discuss the matter with his ministers before taking actions.

Joe was not sure whether Roland Wimbledon would take this matter as seriously as Graycastle's domestic affairs.

There was also a fat chance that he would refuse to help him outright.

If that was the case, all of his efforts would go in vain.

Joe lowered his head and looked at his manacled ankles.

He was tied to the foot of his bed by a chain almost in a man's length.

"Perhaps, I could use this chain..." thought Joe.

"Hey, are you awake?" The curtain of his tent was suddenly pulled back. Joe shielded his eyes against the dazzling rays of sunlight that streaked across his confinement. "Ah, you're awake. Come with us then."

"Wh-where?" Joe asked blankly. For a moment, he was so bemused that all his wild thoughts deserted him.

"To the Kingdom of Wolfheart of course. Didn't you want to save your girl?"

Slowly, he felt more comfortable with the lighting in the room. The next moment, he realized that the man who had been talking to him was none other than Sean.

Sean tossed him a key.

As the message slowly sank in, Joe snatched up the key tremulously and said, "Did, did the king..."

"His Majesty approved our rescue plan. We've decided to transfer you to Neverwinter for a hearing," Sean replied to him nonchalantly. "The unit carrying out this operation has arrived at the Coral Bay. We'll be meeting them there and heading to the Archduke Island straight away."

"They've already arrived?" Joe wondered.

"How come they're so fast?"

He could not believe his ears.

But he had no time to waste on these trivial matters!

Joe scrambled to unlock the shackles. Since he had been sitting in the same position for a considerably long time, he stumbled when he tried to straighten up.

"If you don't feel well..."

"No, please take me with you!"

He implored exasperatedly.

"Then come," said Sean, smiling.

Joe cast a backward glance at the marks on the ground. The sunlight blazed off the crooked lines, silvering the strokes.

He wondered what was waiting for him.

Finally, he saw a ray of hope.

Joe took a deep breath and followed the guard out of the tent.

...

The following day.

At the Coral Bay.

This was a harbor in the far east of the Kingdom of Dawn. Compared to the ports near Graycastle and the Fjords, it looked quite deserted. After the church had invaded the Kingdom of Wolfheart and the Kingdom of Everwinter, the royal families fell and the local nobles started to fight for the thrones. As the city was still in a chaos, business activities reduced significantly in this area. Most sailing ships at the dock were from the Chambers of Commerce at the Fjords. There were very few boats from the Kingdom of Wolfheart or the Kingdom of Everwinter.

One of the ships had a pretty conspicuous appearance among all the others.

This particular ship was made of stone, with no sail but two giant wooden wheels on either side of the ship. Black smoke billowed from the top of it.

"This is the famous Graycastle stone ship," thought Joe.

He had heard about those ships before, but this was his first time actually seeing one.

Joe and Sean boarded the ship and soon, two people greeted them.

A man and a woman.

Joe's eyes flitted between the two people, feeling a little surprised.

For some reason, the woman looked familiar to him.

"Ah, Ms. Zooey and Ms. Betty," Sean greeted them in a cordial tone. "So His Majesty asked you to come here?"

"I was at Neverwinter at that time and have been to the Kingdom of Dawn before," the woman said with a shrug. "If it wasn't an order from the king, I really didn't want to come all the way here... We're now having a fight against the demons at the front. I should have stayed there."

"Also, I prefer Lady Betty to Ms. Betty," the man said, grinning. "Unlike Zooey, I was awakened pretty late, just over 100 years ago."

"Don't you think 100 years is old enough?" the woman retorted, giving him a sideways glance.

"It's strange in the Dream World though. Those people called me Miss. Of course... I don't mind them calling me 'Your Majesty' either."

"Better be Lady Betty," Sean said resignedly, "if that pleases your ladyship."

"Hang on... what are they talking about?" Joe gazed at them blankly, confused about the way they addressed each other. He wondered why the man wanted Sean to regard her as a lady. However Joe saw it, he was a man. Joe did not remotely understand why the demons were at the front either. The Bloody Moon had not appeared yet. What "demons" were they indeed referring to?

"So this man is the last Priest of the church?" The woman called Zooey asked while studying Joe up and down. "The dream of the Queen of Starfall City was finally reduced to a tool that foolish men used to win their political game. That's pathetic. Although she was our enemy, I feel sad for her."

"So, let us finish what she started. I believe it's a sort of retribution," Betty agreed, nodding. "Now everybody's here. Let's go."

"Everybody's... here?"

Having no time to question them, Joe looked around in confusion. The concrete ship was definitely not large enough to accommodate an army. He did not see any other Graycastle ships either.

"Sir..." Joe could not contain himself anymore. He asked gingerly.

Zooey replied to him, "The rescue team you are referring to is here already."

"Here?"

As if seeing through his mind, Zooey pointed at herself, then at Betty and said, "She and I are going to rescue her."

Horror-stricken, Joe looked at Sean and said hysterically, "Sir, Lorenzo has a God's Punishment Army..."

"Five, no more than ten of them, right?" Sean interrupted him.

Joe stared at Sean, dumbfounded. All of a sudden, he lost his strength to speak. "Why, why do they look so relaxed? The God's Punishment Warriors are monsters much more powerful than ordinary men!"

Was it because they knew nothing about the God's Punishment Army's power? No, Graycastle's soldiers had personally fought the God's Punishment Army at Coldwind Ridge. Like the church, they should have known how ferocious those monsters were.

Although the Graycastle soldiers possessed advanced firearms, firearms would be of no use in conquering a fortified castle, because bullets would not be able to travel very far. If the soldiers ran into an unavoidable confrontation with a God's Punishment

Warrior, they would find it hard to repel the God's Punishment Warrior, because the latter did not feel pain. The Warriors would continue to fight until he lost his fighting capacity completely.

Joe expected to see at least one or two hundred soldiers come to rescue. They should gradually infiltrate the castle and remove the hidden enemy one by one at a minimal cost. If the number of soldiers was below 100, this battle might cost them dearly.

But... two?

"How's that possible?"

"You must be wondering how this is possible, right?" Zooey sneered. "That's because you have no idea of Lady Alice's plan. The God's Punishment Warriors you know are just a bunch of useless shells. Two of us is more than enough to take care of them."



# Chapter 1109: The Past

---

"More than enough..."

Joe should have persuaded them to abandon such a ridiculous and even amusing plan. However, words rested on the tip of his tongue when he saw the confident look on their faces.

There was something even more incredible coming next.

Joe expected to give full cooperation to the rescue team and share all the information he knew. The King of Graycastle had promised to save Farrina, so he must need detailed information about the Archduke Island first, and Joe would be the best person to consult with.

He also anticipated that they would pry into the church's secret and the Holy Book, and he had made up his mind to divulge this information if that could save Farrina.

However, after Joe entered the cabin, he realized how ignorant he was about his old enemy, Roland Wimbledon, who had fought against the church for so many years and eventually uprooted the Holy City of Hermes.

He greeted neither an interrogation nor a pre-operation meeting.

The person sitting at the other end of the long table was, on the contrary, the famous dramatist, Kajen Fels.

"Answer all the questions he asks." With these words, Sean withdrew, leaving Joe staring at Kajen blankly.

He had watched Kajen's performances back in the New Holy City.

Although this was something nearly ten years ago, Joe remembered what Kajen looked like.

"What's the King of Graycastle thinking about?" he wondered.

Instead of an army, he met a troupe. Were they really planning to save Farrina?

"Please take a seat, boy," Kajen beckoned him to sit down and asked, "Want some tea or wine?"

"Tea... please."

A pretty young girl soon delivered him a cup of hot tea.

"This is my student, Miss Roentgen."

"Ah... thank you," Joe said distractedly. This was all like a dream in spite of his manacled hands and feet. "Why are you here?"

"Because I made a promise to His Majesty." Kajen said smilingly, "We should have talked in a more comfortable manner, but they insisted on keeping you chained."

"That's fine..." Joe muttered. "What do you want to know?"

"Farrina's story and yours as well."

Joe stared at him in disbelief. "Me... and her?"

"Yes. I want to know when you joined the church, how you met and also how she was captured by Lorenzo," Kajen replied slowly.

"Farrina... Farrina..." The mere sound of her name made his heart quaver in pain. He tried to refrain himself from thinking of her, but their past kept floating out of his memories. Words abandoned him, and his vision blurred.

Farrina had just been a common civilian when she had joined the church.

At that time, she was wearing a patched, coarse and filthy robe, her hands and feet swollen and red due to exposure to crisp, cold air.

She could have died had Joe not taken her in on his way to the Hermes Plateau.

Joe was a member of a diminished noble family with nothing but a reputable family name, so he had decided to try his luck at the church.

The Holy City would not discriminate against a person based on his background.

Since he could read and write, he became a priest clerk.

Farrina, on the other hand, became a warrior trainee.

Joe was not happy with this arrangement.

Priests and warriors were equal in the Holy City. Joe was a little irritated that a civilian girl saved by him could suddenly meet him on equal terms. In his opinion, Farrina should have been assigned to the kitchen or some servant job.

What made him even more upset was that Farrina actually looked quite pretty.

He began to suspect the real reason she had been chosen as a warrior.

Farrina should have been his girl, and his girl only.

Harboring a bitter resentment and virulent jealousy, Joe started to tamper with Farrina's work by taking advantage of his office and even humiliated her in public. However, she never dared stand up for herself, which further inflated his anger.

In the next few years, the young woman gradually revealed her talent. Like a polished gemstone, she dazzled the church.

Farrina was soon promoted from warrior trainee to Judgement Army reserve. Then, she officially joined the Judgement Army and later became a unit leader.

Joe always saw her pace up and down on the stronghold city wall during the Months of Demons.

At that time, he had just been promoted from clerk to assistant priest.

His status was now much lower than Farrina's.

He had, at one time, been afraid of Farrina's retaliation, but

Farrina had not done anything of such sort. Gradually, he had developed a secretive, burning passion as he constantly peered at her behind the wall.

Slowly, Joe came to the realization that Farrina was not as ordinary as he had thought.

Then, Prince Roland of Graycastle arrived.

The pope died and the God's Punishment Army was annihilated. The entire Church of Hermes fell apart overnight.

Numerous believers fled the Holy City. Farrina shouldered the burden to save the rest of the Judgement Army. If she had not reached out her hand to him at the time of the riot, he might have been stamped to death by the swarm of refugees.

At that moment, he had somehow grasped something.

Farrina was not the most eminent figure in the church. There were still the Priest, the Chief Justice and the Senior Commander in the Holy City after the defeat at Coldwind Ridge. They simply abandoned the Holy City to her and the acting pope, Tucker Thor. Everybody knew the Holy City was doomed, but nobody wanted to take their responsibilities. Therefore, they needed someone to hold the Holy City up a little bit longer so that they would have time to escape from the city.

So, this was how a woman in her 20s became the General Commander of the Judgement Army at Hermes. Ironically, she did her best to stabilize the new and old Holy Cities, but fewer and fewer church executives chose to stay. Very often, a building was emptied overnight. By the end of the Months of Demons, there were only around 500 Judgement Warriors left in the church.

She was offered to Roland Wimbledon as a sacrifice.

Did Farrina know nothing about it?

Of course she did. She knew it when she assumed the post.

But she took the job without the slightest hesitation.

Simply because the church had once sheltered and trained her.

Just as she had never revenged on Joe, she did not blame the church either.

She was grateful for the ride Joe had given her.

Joe was deeply touched when he saw Farrina walk up and down at the city wall, drenched in sweat. Her back became a tiny little spot against the white snow. The bead of sweat on the tip of her nose reflected off sunlights.

Joe had never put much faith in the church. He should have left the Holy City a long time ago, but he chose to stay.

Not for God.

He had pledged allegiance to Farrina from the bottom of his heart.

It was not an oath a believer made to the commander of the Judgement Army.

It was one that a knight made to the girl he wanted to protect.

He had fallen in love with her.

# Chapter 1110: A Complete Version of the God's Punishment Warriors

---

Two days later.

Joe was escorted out of his room and onto the deck.

"That's the territory of Earl Lorenzo?" Sean asked.

A greyish white shadow sihouletted against the golden horizon in dawn light.

Joe grabbed on the railing nervously and leaned foward, fearing that he would miss something important.

"That's right. That's the Archduke Island!"

He finally brought the rescue team here.

" Farrina , please hang in there just a little bit longer!"

"There are two ports on the island, one in the east and one west," Joe took a deep breath and said in a rush. "Lorenzo put sentries around the dock area after he became a noble, but he did so mainly to defend against the nobles in the Kingdom of Wolfheart. He doesn't really check merchants' ships. The problem lies in the Castle District. It's heavily guarded, and nobody can sneak in without permission."

He had been longing to tell them the information over the past few days.

Too occupied with answering various questions put by Kajen Fels, Joe had not got a chance to discuss the rescue plan in detail. None of Kajen's questions, obviously, was relevant to this operation or the church's secret.

Kajen asked him in great detail about how he had humiliated Farrina and how they had later worked together to escape from the church. When words failed him, Kajen would ask his student

Roentgen to play Farrina's part to refresh his memories.

Sean only showed up during the dinner time.

He did not seem to care about this operation at all.

That was the reason Joe quickly disclosed what he knew. Whether they listened to him or not, the more information they had, the bigger chance they would have to successfully save Farrina.

"You don't need to worry about that. We have our own way," Sean interrupted him. "I want you to meet someone to let you guys get familiar with each other."

"Who?" Joe asked.

"Our guide."

Sean then blew a whistle and soon, two sailors brought a middle-aged man.

Joe immediately recognized him.

"Hagrid, you traitor — "

As the assistant to Bishop Lorenzo, Hagrid had been Joe's superior back in the church.

Hagrid said scornfully, "Like you really care about the church. If Farrina knows that you've given yourself up to Graycastle, who will be the traitor then?"

"I..." For a moment, Joe was speechless.

"No need to argue here," Sean said as he walked steadily toward them and stood in between. "Mr. Hagrid, you know your task, right?"

Hagrid's voice instantly dropped when he saw the king's guard. He muttered, "Yes, sir. I'm going to take the two soldiers into the castle."

"This is your only chance to get things right. It's all up to you."

"No problem, sir, but are you sure two is enough?"

Joe was surprised that Hagrid was worried about Graycastle.

Then he realized that no matter how many people Hagrid brought into the castle, it would be a solid betrayal anyway. If Graycastle failed, he would face severe punishment; so, he'd better give his full support to Graycastle.

"Rest assured. You'll soon find out..." Sean broke off, his face splitting into a sneer as they slowly approached the Archduke Island, "what a complete version of God's Punishment Warriors was."

...

The rescue team did not leave the dock for the castle until midnight.

Zooey, Betty and two soldiers from the First Army set off for the castle.

The two soldiers were responsible for keeping an eye on Joe and Hagrid.

Since Hagrid was the earl's henchman, nobody was suspicious. Hagrid soon dismissed the patrol team who came to question them.

The guards at the entrance of the castle did not stop them either.

Even though the other five men following Hagrid were all hooded, the guards did not bother raising a single question.

It appeared that Lorenzo did trust Hagrid very much.

The lord's castle was right across the yard.

Hagrid disclosed that all the capable God's Punishment Warriors were now guarding in Earl Lorenzo's bedroom, who was apparently too frightened to sleep alone at the moment, and that there were no more than six of the God's Punishment Warriors in total.



Apart from that, Lorenzo had also replaced his bedroom door with a solid copper door that could not be easily broken by common people but the God's Punishment Warriors.

"I can get Lorenzo out of his room. I'll just say that I know the secret of the treasure," Hagrid said as he headed to the castle. "But then he'll take his God's Punishment Warriors with him, and his sudden appearance will alarm his other guards, so I have to find a way to stop him from doing that —"

"That's fine. You just need to tell us where his bedroom is," Zooey said with a shrug. "Then you'll take Joe to the dungeon and get that girl out of there. You don't have to worry about us."

Hagrid was momentarily stunned and then said, "Well... OK."

He straightened his bow tie, climbed up a flight of steps and knocked on a side door gently.

An old guard poked out his head and said, "Ah, Sir Hagrid. I didn't know it was you..."

"Shut up. I have important matters to report to his lordship. Get out of my way!"

"Y-yes, sir..." the old man stammered and shuffled over. "But what about these people..."

"My spies at the Cage Mountain. Why? Are you prying into his lordship's personal business?"

"No, no, sir!" the old man said gingerly while bowing his head.

The group of people went inside, passed two walls and entered the inner castle.

The guards at the hall were all armored.

Noticing that someone was coming, two guards rested their hands on the hilts of their swords and approached them.

"Lorenzo's bedroom is on the fourth floor... I can't take you up there..." Hagrid said in a hushed voice.

"Hey, isn't it Sir Hagrid? The earl has been talking about you lately. Are these your guests?" The guards saluted to him and turned to Zooey. "Please wait outside the hall, unless you have the earl's permission — Hang on, ma'am — "

Zooey pulled off her hoodie and slowly walked to the guard. Before the guard could finish, a hand had closed in around his neck.

"Sir Hagrid, what — " No sooner had the other guard drawn out his sword than Betty's hand had reached his throat too.

CRUNCH.

The guard's head bent at a weird angle.

Hagrid and Joe sucked in their breath.

"Can a normal person snap one's neck single-handed?"

But Betty and Zooey did not just stop there.

The two witches lifted the two guards off the ground and held their bodies like shields. For a moment, the rest of the guards were all goggling at them, flabbergasted. "Oi, what do you think you're doing?" someone yelled.

"No... something's wrong here. Look, their feet are off the ground!"

"What?"

The guards could not see clearly in the dim light. When they realized what had happened, it was too late.

Zooey and Betty lunged at the confused guards like shadows and reached for their exposed necks.

It was easy to slack off during a long night vigil. Very unfortunately, their attackers happened to be the most powerful human combatants — Extraordinaries.

Joe clapped his hand over his mouth.

Within a few seconds, the other four guards fell to the floor, their necks all broken.

"They have the power and speed of the God's Punishment Army!"

However, the God's Punishment Warriors were unconscious monsters who did not have such brains!

Hagrid was shocked as well.

"They're real God's Punishment Warriors."

Joe remembered Sean's words.

"Is this... also Roland Wimbledon's work?" Joe wondered.

Now, Joe was not sure whether the Supreme Pontiff understood the true nature of the God's Punishment Army.

"Now, do what we told you," Zooey said as she glanced at Joe. "No matter she's alive or not, you mustn't linger. Do you understand?"

"Yes... I do."

Without a word, the two witches went off upstairs.

The stairs were not guarded. Zooey and Betty climbed up to the fourth landing and turned around on a narrow corridor lined with doors, behind which were maids' and servants' room. At the end of the corridor was a giant dark red metal door that glinted in the guttered candlelight.

"So it's really a copper door," Zooey commented, her brows raised.

"What are you going to do?" Betty asked while twitching her lips. "If he locked it, we can't break in."

"We'll find another way if this way is blocked, of course."

"That's what I thought."

Betty kicked open a door beside the lord's bedroom and strode in.

"Aah — " There was a piercing scream. A barely-clothed maid sat

bolt upright, drawing her blanket up to her neck. She gaped at them and asked, "Who, who are you?"

"Too bad I'm not interested in girls," Betty said as she untied her robe and revealed a giant firearm on her back. "If this was a pretty boy..."

"You are scaring her," Zooey said on a sigh as she reached for her grapeshot gun. "One, two..."

"Three!"

The two aimed their guns at the wall and pulled the triggers.

With an earsplitting roar, the inner brick wall soon collapsed under fire, spilling crumbs everywhere, leaving a crooked line of bullet holes in it.

Zooey strode over to the wall and into the master bedroom.

# Chapter 1111: Until Death Do Us Part

---

In a cloud of dust, she caught sight of her target.

Earl Lorenzo.

It was evident that the earl had just woken up. While he was scrambling to pull on his pants, the God's Punishment Warriors at his bedside drew out their swords and lunged at the invaders.

The break-in had apparently alarmed the God's Punishment Warriors. Although they did not have self-consciousness, they were instructed to kill anyone who entered the room by force.

"Betty!" Zooey shouted.

"Got it," Betty answered as she followed into the room and went down to her knee. She cupped her hands and said, "Come!"

After years of training and numerous battles, they had reached a mutual understanding that transcended words. Without even looking at Betty, Zooey jumped backwards and landed precisely on Betty's hands.

Betty got her just in time.

Then she pushed Zooey upward, and the latter rose into the air and flew over the God's Punishment Warriors like a swallow. She grabbed the chandelier hanging down from the ceiling and swung to the bed.

The spacious, luxurious master bedroom instantly became a perfect stage for Betty's personal show.

Zooey raised her grapshot gun.

Time seemed to stop at this moment.

The God's Punishment Warriors wheeled around but were unable to catch up with her.

Betty, on the other hand, made a posture of victory, her back to

the bed. This was definitely a habit she had developed after visiting the Dream World. Apparently, Betty was deeply influenced by special effects in the Magic Movie and the so-called art of combat, believing a real combatant did not need to throw a backward glance at the explosion behind her. Nevertheless, she was not strictly following the rule, for she was leaning sideways while watching the God's Punishment Warriors out of the corner of her eyes, so Zooey did not bother to argue about her silly behavior.

Earl Lorenzo looked up, terrified and astounded.

He had never expected that the God's Punishment Warriors whom he trusted so much would be flattened in less than a minute.

The chandelier fell apart, sending flickers of candlelight in the air.

In the meantime, Zooey aimed her gun at Lorenzo and pulled the trigger.

BOOM!

Then the clock seemed to be ticking again.

A cloud of blood mist erupted from the earl's chest.

As dozens of bullets rained down at him, he first sank under the huge shockwaves and then bounced up. By the time he fell again, his body had turned into a pulp.

Zooey immediately stepped onto the bed. Failing to support Zooey's weight, the bed collapsed magnificently.

At the same time, the God's Punishment Warriors suddenly froze.

"Not a perfect landing, but the rest was brilliant," Betty commented on a whistle. "I wish there was a pair of sunglasses."

Zooey rolled her eyes at her resignedly and said, "Let's recycle those shells first."

"OK, OK..." Betty said, shrugging indifferently. She produced a small horn from her waist pocket and gave it a blow.

It was a special song, the very memory that had transformed these soldiers into God's Punishment Warriors. The song was the activation code for these soulless shells.

"From now on, I'm your new master." Betty cleared her throat and pronounced each word slowly and clearly.

The six God's Punishment Warriors all clapped their fists over their chests.

"But only until you arrive at Neverwinter. Once you get to the Third Border City, you'll be stored away in our warehouse. If you happen to be good-looking, you'll probably have a chance to fight again. Otherwise, you'll be disposed of. Of course, I think the chance of your revival... is pretty slim," Betty jested. She knew they would not respond to her.

Magic Blood had destroyed these soldiers' self-consciousness.

Zooey opened the copper door and saw many guards swarming toward the master bedroom from the end of the corridor. There were patterings of footsteps everywhere. Apparently, the fight had woken everybody up, and the Castle District was now in a state of alert.

"See those armored guys?" Betty said smilingly. "Go finish them."

At these words, the God's Punishment Warriors charged at the guards like a pack of wild beasts. Before the guards realized what had happened, the Warriors had thrust their swords through the guards' chests.

The whole castle was stirred.

...

Flanked by the soldiers from the First Army and Hagrid, Joe soon found the dungeon.

When she saw Farrina dangling from the ceiling, he felt as though bludgeoned by a heavy iron hammer in the chest. His heart

ached so terribly that for a second he could not breathe.

The woman once being so vivaciously beautiful was now drained of life, alive but barely.

Dark whip marks crisscrossed her skin, from her shoulders all the way to her legs.

Most of them were on her back and chest.

Pus came out of her wounds. Apparently, Lorenzo had branded her but had not given her proper treatment.

Despite the torture, Farrina had not disclosed anything to Lorenzo.

Joe walked up to her tremulously, each step heavy and slow.

It was actually the soldiers coming with Joe that reached Farrina first. They unchained her immediately and put her down on the floor.

"Is this the girl you want to save? Hey, do something. Come help us!"

"Ah... yes..." The words jerked Joe out of his trance, who transferred Farrina to a straw mattress next to him at once.

The soldiers seemed to know what to do. They produced various bottles and jars from their knapsacks and started to give her some basic first-aid treatments. Joe did not know what these liquid solutions were used for, but they seemed to work, as Farrina's breath gradually steadied.

While Joe was helping with the wounds, Farrina suddenly let out an almost inaudible groan and slowly opened her eyes.

"How come... it's you..." she muttered. "Is it a dream?"

"No, it isn't. Everything's over!" said Joe as he cupped her face, sobbing.

"Over?" Farrina mumbled. "I see. I'm dead, right? That's why I



see you in the dungeon..."

She slowly raised her hand and touched Joe's face with her crooked fingers. Lorenzo had not only denailed her fingers but also snapped them. Her hand was now no better than a bent piece of wood. "Sorry. The church is gone... I failed you..."

"That's OK. I don't care..." Joe said, feeling hot tears trickle down his cheeks. "This isn't your fault at all!"

"Are you comforting me? Strange... you've never comforted me before," Farrina said weakly, her wounded lips slightly parting. "Anyway, please don't go. Could you stay with me for a while?"

Joe could not contain himself any longer. He held her tight in his arms and said, "I'll be with you. Wherever you go, I'll always be with you... until death do us part!"

"Thank you..." Farrina said, and then lost her consciousness.

# Chapter 1112: The Truth

---

Farrina had a dream.

The swish of a whip, the malicious imprecation of her enemy, and the excruciating pain all started to fade away.

She found herself in a plain white room with polished, reflective floor.

She did not know where this room led. The only thing in her view was a lofty stone door, behind which came faintly some beautiful and eerie music.

"This is probably what the afterlife world looks like," she thought.

After she passed through that door, she would be able to rest in peace.

Farrina could still not reconcile with herself to the fact that she had failed to kill the traitor and revenge the church.

She also felt sorry for failing Tucker Torr, realizing that she was not capable of such an important task and certainly was not a good leader.

That was all she could do.

The only thing that gave her some solace was that she did not yield.

Farrina had thought she would surrender when that hot red iron needle had sunk into her flesh. Thinking back, she could not believe that she had actually made it.

If she had pleaded for mercy at that time, she would now be too mortified to face her companions who had sacrificed themselves for the church.

However, she soon brushed these thoughts off her mind.

She was dying.

There was nothing she could do now.

Farrina ambled to the stone door.

It was rumored that there was no pain or sadness in the world behind the door. Time was frozen in God's kingdom, and everything there lived an eternal life, looking perpetually young and fresh.

She should feel happy about it, but somehow she just couldn't.

Why?

"Farrina..."

Lost and confused, she suddenly heard a distant, misty voice.

She remembered.

That was Joe.

Joe had not participated in the operation, so Lorenzo had not caught him. She was just hallucinating.

Farrina instantly felt relieved even though she knew this was not real.

"I see," she thought.

She realized that she just did not want to leave for that world alone.

Even though she had been abandoned and assigned to a task far beyond her capability, she still wanted to feel needed.

She did not want to be alone anymore.

"Don't go. Could you stay with me for a while?"

"I'll be with you..." the voice said inarticulately. "Wherever you go, I'll always be with you... until death do us part!"

That would be... enough.

An illusion would do.

The memories of that cold winter seemed to come back again, when a carriage had stopped before her just as she had been about to fall on the way to Hermes.

Farrina stepped on the doorsteps leading to the stone door and pushed it open.

"Thank you."

Dazzling light escaped from behind the door and blinded her.

...

When that light dissipated, Farrina opened her eyes and saw a swirling ceiling.

"This is God's kingdom?" she wondered.

It was not as fabulous as she had thought.

Time did not stop either.

She turned around and a familiar face swam into her view.

Farrina asked hesitantly, "Joe?"

Joe was lying on his face next to her, fast asleep. After she called his names several times, Joe opened his eyes blearily. Ecstatic, he exclaimed, "You, you finally woke up!"

"Woke up?" Farrina said while drawing her brows together. "Didn't I just..." she broke off. The excruciating pain was back again.

"You just passed out," Joe clapped his hand over her head. "Don't worry. Everything will be OK."

Farrina stiffened. It took her a while to realize that she had not died. In fact, she had just escaped from the dungeon, which meant...

"Lorenzo is..."

"Dead."

The surprising answer cheered Farrina up. She asked, "Really? How did you do that?"

"I didn't kill him," Joe replied while shaking his head. "The King of Graycastle, Roland Wimbledon, killed him."

Roland Wimbledon... This was the last name she wanted to hear. "What are you talking about? How is it possible that he would help us recover the Archduke Island?" With these words, Farrina looked around immediately. "Hang on... what's this place? Aren't we on the Archduke Island?" she asked.

"We're now on the ship heading to Neverwinter of Graycastle. You were in a coma for three days. The medicine provided by the First Army saved you," Joe said softly. "Take it easy. I'll fill you in later."

An hour later, Farrina finally knew what had happened.

"As for the king's trial, the guard Sean told me that as long as you've never killed or persecuted a witch or a Graycastle citizen, you're not likely to be sentenced to death. You were a warrior of the Vanguard Battalion who fought against demonic beasts on the New Holy City, and I was an assistant priest. Neither of us met any witches. In other words, we'll all be alive!" said Joe.

He got more and more excited as he went on, "Although you sustained severe injuries, a witch called Nana in Neverwinter can heal any wounds, as long as we pay! I'll find a way to get some money. I'll do everything to cure your legs!"

To prevent her from escaping, Lorenzo had broken Farrina's hands and legs, and also smashed her knees with a hammer. Now, Farrina could neither stand nor walk. However, this was not what Farrina cared about.

"Just because of me..."

"What?"

"Just because of me, you sold yourself to the devil!" Farrina

hollered indignantly. "He destroyed the church and all our hopes! How could you do this to Pope Tucker Thor!" Her fierce accusation was soon replaced by a hacking cough.

"Farrina!"

"Don't you touch me!" Farrina bellowed, blood starting to trickle down the corner of her mouth. "The man... ruined the world and the entire human race. How could you ask him for help? My life is nothing to the Battle of Divine Will. What's the point of saving me? I would rather wait for him to fall — "

"Clap, clap, clap."

Someone applauded outside the room.

"That's so touching. I didn't expect to have a mortal's support after over 400 years. Such a pleasant surprise," said a woman as she pushed open the door and entered.

"I support the church that did its best to protect the human race, not the underlings of the King of Graycastle — " Farrina retorted fiercely despite the pain in her chest. However, she stopped dead as the woman came in. Farrina uttered an exclamation of surprise, "Army Commander... Enova?"

For a split second, Farrina could not believe her eyes.

The Martial Arts Hall of Fame in the New Holy City displayed the most distinguished and outstanding Judgement Army Warriors in the history, most of whom had received the highest award granted by the pope, which was the incarnation ceremony for the God's Punishment Warriors. As the commander of the Premium Corp of the Judgement Army, Enova had obtained the greatest achievement a female warrior could possibly dream of. Farrina had always viewed her as her role model.

But... Enova was a person living over 100 years ago.

"Go on," Zooey said as she leaned against the bed. "I want to know how much you really want to support us. Don't be shy. I haven't

been flattered by a mortal for a very long time."

# Chapter 1113: A Third Wheel

---

"Ms. Army Commander?" Joe stammered. It took him a while to register the person in front of him and understand why the woman looked familiar. But... how was this possible?

"I... don't understand. You should have been killed in one of the battles during the Months of Demons..." Farrina swallowed hard. "Plus, God's Punishment Warriors are all extremely pious warriors who have devoted themselves to God. They never — "

"They never speak, as though they're mute?" Zooey talked over her. "This has nothing to do with faith. They never talk because they've been brainwashed, otherwise, we can't use their bodies."

Use their bodies?

"What are you talking about..."

"Well, I want to first ask you though, how did the church advertise the God's Punishment Army?"

Joe replied fervently, "As the warriors who have obtained God's power, the mortal enemy of the witches, and the church's greatest hope to save the world. Only faithful and fearless believers will be granted the honor of becoming a God's Punishment Warrior," Joe paused for a few seconds and then said, "I used to think that saving the world meant to stop the demonic beasts invading the interior from the Great Rupture; however, after I read the last will of Pope Tucker Torr, I learned about the Battle of Divine Will and the existence of demons."

"So, the God's Punishment Army is actually a special army that fights demons," Farrina supplied Joe's answer. "Only the Prival Council of Hermes knew how to hold the incarnation ceremony. Now, Roland Wimbledon has ruined everything."

"It sounds very touching, but unfortunately, none of this is true," Zooey said with a contemptuous smile. "What you believe is that



the God's Punishment Army is merely a tool the usurper used to suppress witches. Although the original purpose of creating such an army was to save the human race, this wasn't the church's original idea, but rather, a witch's."

Farrina stared at Zooey incredulously. She would have refuted such a groundless allegation had the person talking to her not been the famous Enova, whom she admired.

Joe took a sharp intake of breath and said, "Could you... tell us more about it?"

"Fine. I'll satisfy your curiosity then, mortals," Zooey said with a faint smile playing around her lips.

...

After Zooey had told them everything, Farrina felt a pain sear through her ten fingers. Looking down, she noticed that her hands had clenched into fists as her broken fingers started to bleed profusely again.

Now Farrina knew why such a historical figure would suddenly appear in her life, alive and well. The Enova standing in front of her was not the army commander of the Judgement Army she knew, but an ancient witch who has lived for over 400 years.

She would have drawn her sword and fought a life-and-death battle against the witch while accusing her of profanity had she the strength to fight. Even if she could not win, she would not allow a devil to use a warrior's body in such a disrespectful fashion.

However, she was too weak to get out of her bed.

This was ridiculous.

This was a preposterous absurdity!

According to Zooey, witches had founded the church. They were neither the representation of evil nor the devil's underlings but were actually the real heroes dedicated to preserving the human

race. The Queen of Starfall City had sacrificed herself for mankind. Was there anything more ironic than this? The God's Punishment Army was actually a creation of the witches whom she despised. The incarnation ceremony she had been longing to attend was merely a process to provide the witches with more shells. Witches had even, in a way, shaped the world.

"Argue with her. This is a lie, a fabrication!"

A voice yelled in her head. Farrina opened her mouth but nothing came out.

Zooey's story did explain many things.

For example, it explained why some God's Punishment Warriors had mysteriously disappeared.

Why there were bodies of females drained of blood.

Why there were large monasteries in the old Holy City.

And why there were Pure Witches who looked no different than ordinary witches.

If everything was indeed a perfect lie as Zooey had told, the person who had fabricated all of it must have been staying in the church for decades, and know the church's largest secret. Farrina could think of no one but the popes.

Apart from that, there was another piece of solid evidence: "power".

Since the God's Punishment Warriors were designed to kill demons, then the stronger the better. From the fact that two God's Punishment Witches could easily break through the castle on Archduke Island guarded by the God's Punishment Warriors, Farrina judged that a conscious man was apparently much more powerful than an unconscious killing machine. If witches could exert such incredible power in a body of a God's Punishment Warrior, why had the church wanted to kill them? Why had they not made good use of them instead? The church could have

definitely used Pure Witches if they were prejudiced against ordinary witches.

In fact, there had not been a single God's Punishment Witch in Hermes.

Farrina knew the reason.

Because Pure Witches could be subdued by a God's Stone.

But the church had no feasible measure to control a God's Punishment Witch as powerful as an Extraordinary.

As a result, they had not considered the creation of God's Punishment Witches.

If the pope in the Holy City had indeed cared about the human race, many believers would have been willing to sacrifice themselves, including witches.

However, this possibility had long since passed.

Apparently, the church was not as passionate about saving the world as they appeared to be.

"Everything the church did was a joke," Farrina thought weakly in bed. "The God's Punishment Warriors were meant to fight the demons but they used them to merely overpower witches."

This fact seemed to have also gradually dawned on Joe, who asked nervously, "How many people like you are there in Neverwinter?"

"Several hundred," Zooey answered, shrugging. "We use the bodies donated by the church, so don't be too flustered if you see someone you know."

Farrina vaguely understood why Joe asked that.

It was impossible for the witches to impersonate hundreds of God's Punishment Warriors at a time.

Judging from the innocent look on Zooey's face, Farrina knew

she was telling the truth.

Zooey's answer cleared her last doubt.

Farrina felt the world that she had been relying on gradually fall apart.

She wanted to be needed.

She used to put her faith in the church. As a church member, she was obligated to shoulder the responsibility of saving the four kingdoms and the human race. But now, everything she had once firmly believed in began to crumble like a weathered wall inside her, behind which nothing remained.

She must... do something.

"The church... the church can rectify it... and make things right again..." Farrina said with difficulty.

"How?" Zooey asked, shooting her a cold stare.

"You need... bodies to create God's Punishment Witches, right? Only the church can do that. For example, me — " Farrina gasped. "I can offer my body."

"Hmm," Zooey said, a playful smile fluttering over her face. "You don't mind losing your mind?"

"Farrina!" Joe exclaimed exasperatedly

"If that will save the human race — "

In this way, she would have something else to rely on and would be needed again...

However, her dream was shattered as Zooey said coldly to her, "Very interesting, mortal, but we no longer need God's Punishment Witches anymore."

"Wh-why?"

"Because it doesn't work," Zooey said while spreading out her hands. "The plan probably would have worked if this was still 400

years ago, but the demons have improved a lot too. God's Punishment Witches can't defeat them anymore. That's why all of us are now supporting the King of Graycastle."

"..." Farrina's parched lips parted like a dumb man's. For a moment, phrases attempted to form in her mouth but in the end, she only managed to produce a few odd hissing noises.

"Living witches, no matter how weak they are, can still be very powerful once they've found the right path. King Roland discovered that ordinary witches don't necessarily need magic blood or a shell to become strong. Everyone now believes that they can learn and make progress," Zooey said as she rose to her feet and headed to the door. "In other words, no witch would be willing to offer their blood even if you wanted to sacrifice your body, because it's not worth it."

Zooey stopped and smiled at Farrina at the doorway.

"Let me be frank with you, the church was a mistake from the beginning."

Farrina heard something crack deep down inside.

# Chapter 1114: A Return

---

"You rarely have such a serious talk with a mortal."

Betty, who had been waiting for her at the railing, approached Zooey as she came out of the cabin.

"I talk more with King Roland," Zooey replied indifferently.

"But we all know he's not technically a real mortal," Betty said in a sorrowful tone. "Sean wanted you to only talk about the origin of the church and the immense power of the God's Punishment Witches. But what did you end up saying? 'It's not worth it', and 'the church was a mistake from the beginning'," Betty broke off while clicking her tongue. "That was too much information for a patient."

"Our task is to recover the ancient treasure and rescue the captured believer. Whether she's alive or not, that's none of our business," Zooey said as she stopped and narrowed her eyes at Betty. "Speaking of you... since when did you start to care about a mortal?"

"Shouldn't people care about each other?"

"Yeah, we should, but it doesn't sound like something you would say." Zooey paused for a moment and said, "Hang on... you're just gloating over her misfortune, aren't you?"

"Hey, don't say it out loud," Betty said while sniggering. "Because I really wanted to go in there with you —"

"Yes," Zooey said on a sigh. "She does look like them."

"She's the express image of them," Betty said as she walked to Zooey and leaned against the porthole. "If she were born 400 years earlier, and if she were a witch, then in the last Union meeting..."

"She would definitely support Lady Alice rather than us," Zooey supplied Betty's answer. "That's what makes me upset."

Farrina did not resemble a particular individual, but a specific group of people.

She resembled a group of survived Union witches facing an uncertain and dismal future.

They had had very few choices at that time.

Most of them had chosen to support the plan of the God's Punishment Witches instead of the hopeless proposal of "the Chosen One", even though this meant they would have to sacrifice themselves in the end.

On that meeting that had determined their fate, Alice had completely flattened Natalia, winning the support of the great majority. At the end of the meeting, people on the floor had set up a chant of "the human race will perpetuate. Long live the witches", and their voices reverberated across the hall. In fact, even some Natalia's supporters had become hesitant in the end, uncertain whether their choice would lead them to the light at the end of the tunnel. Zooey, at that time, could not do anything for the Queen of Sunchaser but stomped her feet in agitation.

Now she took her anger out on Farrina.

Zooey was not repudiating any church believer per se but the disbanded Union instead.

She had wanted to tell them that even the weakest witch had the potential to become strong.

She had also wanted to let them know that ignorant, short-sighted mortals could also make a contribution.

What she had wanted to say most badly was "if only they could hang in there just a bit longer..."

She wished they had not reached a parting of the ways just because of different opinions.

But all her thoughts dissolved into a deep sigh.

With no solid and conclusive evidence, the Three Chiefs would inevitably make the same choice if everything had started all over again.

Only a person with a heart of steel was capable of helping everyone get through that dark times when the regime of the Union was tottering.

"If only Lady Alice, Lady Eleanor and Lady Natalie could see what we have now..."

Zooey muttered as she gazed at the boundless blue ocean.

...

In another room on the other side of the cabin, Kajen put down his quill, shocked and dismay.

"Mr. Kajen..." said Roentgen, who was equally perplexed by what they had just heard. "I'm afraid we've known too much."

To let Kajen better understand the story of Joe and Farrina, Sean had settled him and his student down in a room adjacent to the patient's cabin and made a little adjustment to the wall. He had set up a one-way transparent mirror which allowed Kajen to peer through the wall and see everything that happened in the next room. In addition to that, Sean had also installed two amplifiers that enabled Kajen to hear the contents of their conversation clearly.

It was Kajen Fels' first time to pry into others' privacy. Although he understood it was not very appropriate, the temptation was just too great to resist. This was just like a reality show where actors documented unscripted real-life situations. He, on the other hand, was a viewer and also recorder of the show.

Much to his consternation, he had not only heard a story about love and redemption but also learned a secret, appalling history of the church.

The witch empire had established the Four Kingdoms?



The church was the offspring of the Union?

Those ancient witches could possess a human body?

Every single piece of information would be sufficient to disquiet the public.

Roentgen peeped through the door restlessly, as though fearing some guards would suddenly burst in, throw a burlap sack over her head and dump her into the ocean.

The words of King Roland gradually came floating out of Kajen's memories.

"It's a romance in dark times."

"You should know what 'based on' means."

Perhaps, Roland had predicted that this would happen.

Anyway, he could not chicken out now.

Even if he was presented the choice to back out, he would not do so.

Dimly, Kajen had a feeling that this play would create a huge commotion.

This play would be unprecedented and also set a milestone for the future play industry.

Just at that moment, Kajen saw the two people in the next room start to talk again.

He immediately picked up the amplifiers.

...

"So... that's what we've got in the end..." Farrina stared at Joe, her eyes sliding out of focus. "The church is gone... Nobody needs me anymore... You saved me but I can't give you anything as a return... I'm sorry..."

Her voice, in the end, was hardly over a whisper.

Joe grasped her hand, a look of melancholy on his face and blustered, "I saved you not for the damn church!"

His thundering voice shocked Farrina.

"I never put much faith in the church. I joined the church just to find something to do. Everyone pretended to be a pious believer because they wanted to get promoted fast. I used to be a noble, and it doesn't make sense that I would devote everything to God!"

"You — " Farrina said, biting her lip, her eyes fixing on Joe again. She slowly raised her hand in a painful sort of way, in an attempt to slap in his face.

Joe did not dodge but held his head even a little higher.

But Farrina dropped her hand in the end. She said, "You're... lying, aren't you? You followed me to the Kingdom of Wolfheart after the defeat of the God's Punishment Army. How could you say that you don't have... much faith in the church?"

Joe grabbed her by the arm and said feverishly, "I did so because I want to be with you! Screw the Supreme Pontiff! Screw the Battle of Divine Will!"

"Joe!"

"Let me finish!," Joe talked over her. He had been waiting for this opportunity to pour his heart out for too long. He had once thought he would have never had the chance to do so. Now, he simply could not let this chance slip through his fingers again. "After you were captured, I tried every possible means to come to your rescue. It had nothing to do with the future of Hermes, because I know the world wouldn't be any different without the church. All I need is you... I don't want to lose you... I need you!"

CRACK.

The quill in Kaje's hand snapped.

"You... need me?" Farrina echoed perplexedly.

"Didn't you say you couldn't return me anything? Then I'll demand something from you as a return," Joe said as he clutched Farrina under his arms. "Be with me — you must stay with me wherever you go. No matter what our fate will be, we'll face it together. This... is what I want from you as a return!"

# Chapter 1115: An Epochal Missile Test

---

A week later in the valley of the Impassable Mountain Range

After the previous napalm missile test, the valley became Roland's new test site. Since there were more visitors from the northwest of the city coming to the Misty Forest than ever, it was now practically impossible to simply create a clearing in the suburb to conduct the test. Therefore, Roland had to pick a new test site that was closer to the North Slope laboratory and attracted less attention from the public.

Considering their weapons would become increasingly powerful in the future, it was only natural to relocate the test site.

This time, Roland was going to test out the anti-demon rocket-propelled grenade he had previously worked on.

With the development of the industrial technology as well as abundant research, it had only taken Roland five days to complete the test - the shortest so far in Neverwinter.

Nevertheless, the speed test was also largely attributed to the simple structure of the grenade itself.

In Roland's previous world, even the worst terrorist who barely knew anything about military weapons was able to produce a giant home-made RPG with a gas can and a hosepipe. If equipped with a pickup truck, they could transform the RPG into a self-propelled multi-gun. As the industrial system in Neverwinter steadily matured, Roland could now produce a rudimentary grenade effortlessly.

"So, I just need to aim the missile head at the target and then pull the trigger, right?" said Alethea brightly as she scooped up the launcher with her tentacle. As a former Senior Blessed Warrior, she was very interested in the new firearm, especially when this firearm was particularly designed to defend against the demons.

Except, the whole situation was a little strange and creepy as far as Roland could see.

What he saw now was a huge blob monster covered in tentacles holding an RPG, which was not a common weapon it normally used - as depicted in horror movies. More often than not, a tentacle monster like that would attack their enemy with their fatal stare, swords and shields, a powerful sucker, and special body fluids. An RPG, in this scenario, was simply a little out of place.

Roland asked the original carriers to conduct the test purely out of safety concerns. Neither the soldiers nor the God's Punishment Witches could possibly survive a close-range shot when the firearm was unintentionally discharged. Only the original carriers had the ability to transport the weapon with their tentacles to a remote, distant area and thus avoid such unfortunate accidents.

"Just make sure that you aren't pointing your tail at yourself or anyone," Roland said as he coughed. "Go ahead."

Alethea gave her main tentacle a quick tap of comprehension and pulled the trigger.

A sudden flash erupted from the muzzle and zoomed across the field toward the target 100 meters away.

The projectile gently arced in the air and hit the lower part of the target. With a deafening crash, the targetted iron case rolled over on the ground, fully intact.

Compared to the earth-shattering roar of the Longsong Cannon and the furious flames that overcast the sky produced by the napalm bomb, the performance of this weapon didn't seem very satisfactory. The explosion emitted hardly any gunfire, dust, nor particles. Within a few seconds, the wind had dispersed the faintest hint of smoke produced by the bomb.

The atmosphere became awkwardly silent.

Only Roland didn't look too disappointed at the result. On the

contrary, he said smilingly, "Go retrieve it and take a look."

Soon, two God's Punishment Witches brought the iron case back.

"Well, this..."

As they approached the case and examined it carefully, they found a scorched white mark at the bottom of the case, at the center of which was a small dent that was three fingers wide.

"Did the missile penetrate it?" Pasha asked curiously. "It wasn't slow but not fast either. At least, it appears to be more powerful than a regular bullet. I don't think a revolver could do that."

"I don't think a Mark I type HMG could do that either," Alethea remarked as she drew closer. "This iron case is a replica of the stone pillar thrown by the Spider Demons. It's plastered with steel plates as thick as a man's finger, so it isn't easy to penetrate. Right, we put a tester in it earlier. Open it and see what it looks like now."

When Alethea stretched out two of her tentacles and opened the heavy lid of the case, everybody gasped in surprise.

The several chickens Roland had hung with an iron wire from the ceiling of the case to simulate the demons in the stone pillars were now nothing but a pulp, topped with a few burned, blackened chicken feathers.

"It seems to be working," Roland said while nodding in satisfaction. He was more surprised at the fact that Alethea had hit the case with one single shot than the burned chickens, for he had thought it would take at least five or six shots for a successful attempt.

Roland had foreseen that the explosion would not produce dazzling flames or earsplitting noises, because, essentially, the missile did not release considerable energy. The direct result of low reaction energy was the low velocity of the projectile.

When the amount of gunpowder remained constant then the larger the missile head was, the greater the air resistance would be;

the heavier the missile head was, the slower it would travel through the air. To enhance the firing accuracy, Roland abandoned the idea of using a huge caliber weapon but confined the caliber of the grenade to 40 millimeters, which was the same as that of the barrel. The front part of the missile was shaped as a cone in order to reduce air resistance.

Based on the firing result, the missile seemed to be quite steady when it streaked across the sky. Although it was much smaller than a Panfauster, it was large enough to pierce armor plates of ten millimeters thick. Currently, the missile was almost as powerful as the stone pillar projected by the demons.

"Do you think this weapon could defeat the Senior Demons?" Roland asked as he turned to Pasha and the other witches.

"Well... " Alethea spoke first. "It's hard to say. There are strong and weak Senior Demons, just as we have Extraordinaries and Transcendents. If our enemy is swift and fast or happens to be a Magic Slayer, then... to be honest, the chance of hitting it in its face is very slim. They can easily dodge the grenade while the grenade is traveling in the air. However — "

She broke off and continued with an abrupt rise in her voice, "This is definitely an epochal weapon, Your Majesty, because it closes the gap between demons and common people. It offers us an opportunity to outnumber our enemy. I can't praise this novel invention enough!"

"Exactly," Pasha rejoined smilingly. "It was impossible for a mortal to wound a Senior Demon in the past. If we had such a weapon in the Taquila age, Lady Natalia would be thrilled."

"And I just discovered another way to significantly improve the accuracy rate," Alethea said while swaying her main tentacle.

"Yes?" Roland said as he looked at her. "What is it?"

"To equip each individual God's Punishment Witch with this

weapon," Alethea answered in exhilaration. "Only the Extraordinaries can rival the Senior Demons. If the enemy is shot in the face, then there's no way it can survive the shot, no matter how strong it is!"

"Don't worry. It's an individual weapon, and certainly everybody will have one," Roland promised with a smile. "So will the God's Punishment Witches."

The next step would be further increasing the power of the missile while maintaining its current traveling speed and overhead cost. Meanwhile, Roland had to also create a new weapon that had a large caliber to target the Spider Demons that moved much slower than the Senior Demons. Considering they would eventually invade the demons' city and the Spider Demons would very likely lurk around alleys and streets, Roland felt it necessary to develop a new type of bomb as early as possible.

While Roland was deep in thought, his guard suddenly came to deliver him a message.

"Your Majesty, Sir Sean and his rescue team have returned from the Kingdom of Wolfheart. They've just reached the dock by the inner river."



# Chapter 1116: An Underground Laboratory

---

...

In the lord's office in the castle.

It took Sean two hours to recount his story.

Generally speaking, the plan had been successfully executed. Zooey and Betty had not only retrieved the ancient Magic Cube but also manipulated the God's Punishment Warriors into looting the entire treasury of the Archduke Island. All the treasures, including jewels and gemstones, had been dumped into a vacant cabin. Henceforth, all the remnants the Church of Hermes were uprooted. Nobody on the Archduke Island would ever have any engagement with the church.

On the other hand, Kajen Fels took his leave right after the ship disembarked and returned to his hotel with his student. It was obvious that he could not wait to work on his new play.

Both Farrina and Joe were detained, awaiting for their trial which would be presided by the Graycastle Security Bureau.

"I'll leave them to you," Roland looked away and said quietly to Nightingale.

Nightingale gave him a pinch of comprehension on the shoulder.

"So, is the legendary treasure... the Magic Ceremony Cube in this lead box?" Roland asked as he cast a look at the gray box next to Sean. Based on the traitor, Hagrid's description, the Cube was of the size of a palm and made out of a polished stone. In consideration of the lethal property of radioactive material, Roland had asked the rescue team to take full protective measures before they had set off for the journey.

"Yes, I kept it in my custody during the whole trip as you had instructed. Other than Miss Zooey and Miss Betty, nobody has touched it," Sean replied. "However, I found an unusual sign before

putting it in this lead box."

"What sign?"

"Your Majesty, do you remember in my encrypted letter, I talked about the reason Lorenzo had decided to send Hagrid to the Cage Mountain to investigate the treasure?"

Roland said thoughtfully, "Because the treasure suddenly emanated blue light for the first time in the past 100 years?"

"Yes," Sean confirmed with a nod. "When Miss Zooey brought back the Magic Ceremony Cube, she said one thing that caught my attention. She said 'the blue light seems to be changing directions all the time'. So I took another look and noticed the light always pointed at me like a compass. To be honest, I was terrified at that moment and almost dropped it."

Roland felt a chill running down his spine as he listened to Sean's narrative. However, he still managed to keep a straight face and said nonchalantly, "And did you find out the reason?"

"Maybe," Sean said as he produced something from his pocket and placed it on the mahogany desk. "After I calmed down, I gave it some thought and think it's not likely that an ancient artifact would respond to a common person. It must be sensing something else. After a further examination, I discovered the light wasn't pointing at me, but this coin.

It was the exact enriched uranium coin Azima had used to look for uranium mines, which she had given back to Sean after her return to Neverwinter.

In other words, the Magic Ceremony Cube illuminated because it sensed the coin.

This sounded interesting.

Roland spoke after a moment of reflection, "I see. You did a good job. Off you go."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

After Sean retired from the room, Nightingale revealed herself from the Mist and studied the lead box up and down.

"Any luck?"

"This is a magic artifact," Nightingale said positively. "Although it looked like a crude rock, it contains power. I saw something similar to Magic Cyclone from the Mist, just like the Taquila Witches' magic core."

Roland came to realize that magic power shaped this world in a more subtle and fundamental way than he had originally thought. Unfortunately, based on the current information, he knew little about magic power except that different races viewed and used magic power differently. With insufficient analytical tools, it was hard for him to study it systematically.

However, Roland could still learn about magic power from his personal experience. Before the development of the classical mechanics theory, people used to create tools based on their own observations and daily practices. Now, since he had just observed a new phenemon, he simply needed to to do more research.

"Let's go to the Third Border City," Roland said. "I wonder if Celine has set up a laboratory for me."

Anyway, this cursed artifact should not be brought into the castle before he confirmed it was completely harmless.

...

"What brought you back?" Pasha said as she greeted Roland in the underground hall. "Anything wrong with the new weapon?"

Roland shook his head and said, "I asked Celine to dig a cave earlier. Is there any update on this matter?"

"Oh, are you talking about that secret metal chamber? Everything is pretty much good to go except the elevator. She's

now in the chamber. Do you want to take a look?"

After receiving an affirmative answer from Roland, Pasha said while bending her main tentacle, "Please follow me."

When Roland had decided to dispatch the God's Punishment Witches to the Kingdom of Wolfheart a week ago, he had also instructed Celine to build a research facility — an enclosed laboratory deep down underneath the ground.

If the Magic Ceremony Cube was indeed radioactive, it would be very dangerous to conduct an experiment above the ground. Since he was still not sure whether Nana could cure injuries arising from radiation, it would be better to conduct the research underground.

As Roland followed the original carrier off to the laboratory, he told Pasha about what had happened in the Kingdom of Wolfheart.

"I see," Pasha said with a smile. "Better to leave it to Celine than someone else. She's a top researcher back in the Quest Society, and no one knows better about magic power and the repair and reconstruction of this artifact than her. After she changed her body, her skills have improved by leaps and bounds. I'm not sure about others, but I can tell you that Celine is the only person who offered to merge with the carrier before Taquila showed signs of a downfall."

"Ugh..." Nightingale commented with a disgusted look. "Do you mean she prefers to be a blob with tentacles over human?"

"If that would help her explore the world," Pasha replied while shaking her tentacle. "She complained a lot back in the Quest Society about not having enough hands to multitask and also about getting tired easily. If she could transfer her soul back then, she would probably make that choice."

After they walked for about seven minutes, they reached the end of the passage where a big cave materialized in front of them.

"This is the entrance. It'll take us a few days to install the

elevator," Pasha said as she dropped down her main tentacle. "Come on."

"Um... is this the only way to get down there?" Nightingale asked hesitantly as she stared at the numerous wriggly tentacles, a look of total distrust on her face.

"This is the fastest way," Pasha said. "Don't worry. These small tentacles are pretty flexible and durable."

Roland took a deep breath and clambered up the head of the original carrier. He had thought he would have to endure a really uncomfortable ride, but actually, those tentacles were as soft as a rug.

After Nightingale also scrambled up the original carrier, Pasha entered the cave and hurtled toward the bottom.

They dropped around 100 meters before Pasha slowly came to a stop. Then, Roland saw the gleaming metal door of the laboratory stand magnificently before him.

# Chapter 1117: The Light of the Cursed

---

Although Roland designed the laboratory himself, he was still quite impressed with its real version.

Thousands of Stones of Lighting illuminated the pitch-black underground space, spilling light on the surrounding rocks plastered with lead plates, which formed an enclosed area the size of a basket ball court.

There was, somehow, a sort of beauty in those smooth, glinty and colorless lead plates.

It was the beauty of industrialization.

"If we lose the Battle of Divine Will, this place will become an ancient relic as well after hundreds of years, right?" Roland murmured.

And it would be a relic completely different from those of the underground civilization and the demons.

The marks on the lead plates would then become evidence that proved that the human civilization had, at one time, been prosperous.

"Probably," Pasha replied as she put Roland and Nightingale down gently. "However, I've never had such a strong feeling as I have now that we'll survive in the end."

"I believe so too," Roland said smilingly and stepped into the laboratory.

The entire room was divided into two sections, one for operation and the other observation. A concrete wall of around half a meter thick, which was also heavily protected by lead plates, separated the two chambers. Lead oxide had been added to the glass implanted at the center of the wall created by Lucia. Due to the limitation in the current technologies, the lead glass was not as transparent and bright as modern glass. However, it was sufficient

for people to see through.

"Ah, you're here, Your Majesty," Celine said as she poked her main tentacle out of the door of the operation chamber, her giant body looming over them menacingly. However, the threatening atmosphere soon lightened as they saw bolts and rulers in the crook of her auxiliary tentacles. "I heard Pasha talking when I was installing a lead plate. Did Zooey bring the ancient treasure back?"

"It's right in this box," Roland answered as he placed the lead box on her main tentacle. He then entered the operation chamber and examined it carefully.

"What do you think? This is designed and built solely according to your instructions," Celine said while raising her tentacles. "But is it really necessary? If the curse is a sort of light, wouldn't a regular wall be sufficient to block it out?"

"Just in case. If my theory is correct, the light won't be detected by naked eyes and can be highly penetrative. Regular walls do block it, but they have to be several meters thick," Roland replied as he turned to the two ancient witches. "So, you can never judge things based on your instincts. Even though the original carriers are very resistant to various perils, before we obtain a thorough understanding of the Magic Cube, we have to follow our procedures."

Since radiation would break down DNA structures and thus hinder the replication process of DNAs, it would cause great damage to organs with a fast metabolism. Organs such as heart and brain were more resistant to radiation than the others. Judging from the incredibly long lifespan of the original carriers who could normally live for hundreds of years, Roland believed that they were also somewhat immune to radiation. That was also the reason why Roland had asked Celine to conduct the test.

Celine broke into a laugh and said, "You remind me of the president of the Quest Society. Don't worry. One of the principles

of the Quest Society is to follow rules. I'll be cautious."

Roland returned a nod, "So let's begin."

Celine thus shut herself in the operation chamber.

The first step according to the operation manual was to keep all the doors of the laboratory closed during the experiment. Everybody should recede to the observation room except the operator.

Through the lead glass, Roland saw Celine open the box and take out of the Magic Cube.

Like Sean had said, a jet of pale blue light escaped from the crack of the stone and pointed at the coin on the work station.

"Interesting," Celine mumbled while studying it attentatively. "This isn't activated, right?"

Since the wall blocked the transmission of sounds, Roland replied with his mind, "According to Sean, the Earl of the Archduke Island touched it after it emanated the blue light, so I think it functions as an indicator."

"I see," Celine said while snatching up the Magic Cube and wrapping it with her tentacles.

"What's she doing?" Nightingale asked.

"Feeling," explained Pasha. "Our tentacles are much more sensitive than men's fingers. They can touch, smell, and remember every single dent and bump on the surface of an object. A genius like Celine can even form a picture of the outline and details of the object by touching it. Unfortunately, this part of the information is conveyed via the carrier's mind only. Human brains can't process it."

"Can you see what she has sensed?" Roland asked in surprise.

"If she's willing to share, " Pasha said as she stretched out one of her tentacles and tapped the glass. "Now I see the Magic Cube right



in front of me."

This was such a convenient ability. Like a psychological network, it not only enabled the original carriers to share their thoughts but also 3D visions.

"The length and the width of the Magic Ceremony Cube are almost the same. They are both 15 centimeters. The cube is hollow, and there are cracks. I can tell that it isn't a whole piece," Celine suddenly spoke.

"What do you mean?"

"The Cube seems to consist of several stones. Hold on... I probably have just found the key to opening it."

At these words, all the tentacles relinquished their grip on the Cube, and Roland saw a small opening at the back of the Cube, as though this was the entrance to a treasury well hidden for years.

"Wow, impressive," Roland remarked in amazement. "That was fast."

Over the past hundred years since the Magic Ceremony Cube had been smuggled out of the temple, none of its previous owners, despite extensive research, had discovered that this was actually not made out of a single stone.

"I told you Celine is the best person to consult," Pasha said with a smile. "She pieced together the entire magic core of the underground civilization."

"Your Majesty, I have a question," Celine put in as she poked her tentacle into the opening. "Why does it only respond to this coin? You say the Magic Cube has been unresponsive for years. I thought probably it had exhausted its power, just like a magic stone or a sigil. However, after I check it, I find, as you may also notice, that there's still some magic power in it. So, is it possible that what this thing lacks... is the element used to create what you call 'the Glory of the Sun'?"

"I think so too," Roland replied while curling his lips. "You can try to insert the coin, but it may activate the Magic Cube, so you must take some protective measures."

"Got it," said Celine as she moved to the other side of the work station behind a plate. The plate was a round lead shield with four little holes in the middle, which allowed her auxiliary tentacles to pass through. Celine put the coin into the Magic Cube, and the opening immediately closed itself. Meanwhile, the light at the top of the Cube instantly turned dark red.

He was right!

Roland and Nightingale exchanged a look. Both of them were excited.

Celine continued to study the Cube for a while when suddenly, a flash of red light erupted from the other side of the Cube and fell straight onto the wall, adding a reddish hue to the dull, colorless laboratory.

# Chapter 1118: Experiment Records

---

"Recording"

On the 12th, Day 1 of the experiment.

According to His Majesty's instructions, I conducted a dangerous experiment.

I put 30 roosters on the work station, one of which was placed under the direct radiation of the red light.

The roosters were subject to the radiation for five minutes.

The rooster subject that took direct radiation reacted violently. It threw itself against the cage fiercely, whereas the others did not show any visible response.

I smelled a whiff of burned flesh in the laboratory.

After the experiment, I found that the feathers that came off the subject rooster were slightly burned. As the burn was fairly minor, I judged the cause of the feather loss to be from the struggle and not the radiation.

As for the subject rooster itself, it seemed normal except for being a little crestfallen.

"From my point of view, a torch is even more lethal than the radiation."

Recorder: Celine.

...

The 13th, Day 2 of the experiment.

Something happened.

The subject rooster started to have symptoms of diarrhea and also began to wail as if it was infected by the demonic plague.

The other roosters acted normal.

His Majesty looked grave and sober (delete this sentence in the official report).

No new experiment today.

...

The 14th, Day 3 of the experiment.

The subject rooster died.

The autopsy showed that there was fluid accumulation and internal bleeding in the rooster's body. Signs of decomposition had also been found in its hypodermis, which would normally take place one day after an animal has died.

In other words, the red light killed the rooster's skin when it was still alive.

Things are becoming a little interesting now.

Considering what had happened in the Temple of the Cursed and Thorn Town as well as the drawings on the murals, the findings did explain some things.

The cursed ones seemed to be enduring excruciating pain, although they looked fine physically, until every inch of their skins peeled off and festered. It must be awful to watch yourself die little by little and be unable to do anything to stop it.

I take back my previous remark. The radiation was more lethal than a torch, and it killed in a more subtle and sinister way.

However, His Majesty had his own opinion on this matter.

He believed the red light had a detrimental effect on the self-renewal process of living beings.

Our body was constantly growing and dying on a microscopic level to make sure these two process were balanced. The termination of cell growth would immediately result in massive acute necrosis of skins and organs. That was probably what the curse really was.

I agreed with him given that no other evidence proved otherwise (please delete the following paragraph in the official report).

Microscopes are fascinating.

The materials collected from the Dream World also corroborated my research findings and showed that living beings were made of numerous tiny growing cells.

The reason that the light could penetrate a body was that our cells are not tightly packed in our body but instead in a loose formation.

I feel like I have entered a new realm.

It is a pity that I can't visit the Dream World.

I have learned that it would normally take nine years to complete the "high school" curriculum and have a thorough understanding of the human body.

So it will probably be a little hard for Phyllis, Elena, and the other witches to learn all the courses in such a short period of time.

...

The 16th, Day 5 of the experiment.

All the roosters, both alive and dead, were buried deep underground.

The laboratory was thoroughly cleansed.

I continued with the experiment the following day.

This time, I used three cows as my research subject. The purpose of the research was to see whether the Magic Ceremony Cube could be used as a weapon and how well the cows could hold up when exposed to the red light.

...

The 20th, Day 9 of the experiment.

The result was frustrating.

The three cows were each exposed to the red light for 10, 15, and 30 minutes respectively.

However, even the cow with the highest exposure lived for four days.

Whether this red light would cause harm to the demons remains unknown, but one thing was certain: the demons would never stand transfixed to one spot waiting for the light. Even if the "curse" did affect the demons, the demons would only be exposed to the red light for a fraction of a second on the battlefield.

The murals in the temple, which depicted that the Magic Ceremony Cube had defeated giant monsters, were indeed exaggerating.

Or another possibility is that... those monsters were particularly vulnerable to the "curse".

...

The 21st, Day 10 of the experiment.

Testing the radiation range.

King Roland agreed to conduct the experiment outdoors after I assured him that the radiation would not travel to the surrounding areas.

The test site was still in the valley at the base of the Impassable Mountain Range.

The outcome was very disappointing.

The red light could not travel more than 100 meters, and basically anything could more or less block it.

For some metals, the red light could not penetrate them at all.

For example, a stack of ten gold royals.

Even water could somewhat block it.

I thus concluded that the light could not be used as a weapon.

...

The 26th, Day 15 of the experiment.

Since Nana has returned from the front, we conducted a healing test.

The damage caused by the radiation was curable, but not completely.

For instance, Nana could not repair the damaged skin or heal the contaminated organs of the subject cows. Their conditions would continue to deteriorate, and the parts that had been healed would be contaminated again later.

However, if we implanted a healed organ to another healthy cow, the health of the subject cow's organ would cease to decline.

In other words, the "curse" could potentially be removed provided that we reconstruct the infected body.

However, such a task was beyond Nana's ability.

To do so, we had to utilize Spear Passi's channeling ability, so we had to set this idea aside for the time being.

I put it as "incurable" for now just in case.

By the way, the first cow died 10 days after being exposed to the red light.

...

The 28th, Day 17 of the experiment.

The Magic Ceremony Cube emanated the blue light again.

The coin was gone.

Fortunately, His Majesty had another coin that was exactly the same as the previous one.

However, as this was the source material to produce "the Glory of the Sun" and it was extremely hard to collect, I felt I was wasting the most precious resource in the world.

Furthermore, the Magic Cube had exhausted its magic power, but, like a Sigil, it could be recharged.

Considering the test was resource-consuming, I did not think it a good idea to continue with the experiment.

I hope that we can dismantle it after we finished the resistance test.

...

Roland closed the "Official Research Journal" and heaved a sigh.

"You're reading it again," Nightingale said while snacking on dried fish on a recliner. "Isn't it obvious? The ancient treasure is merely an instrument to torture captives. It doesn't possess any incredible powers whatsoever."

As the murals had suggested, the only reason for this invention was to torture enemies.

The mechanism of this Cube was probably very similar to that of ionizing radiation. Its source material was the uranium coin. Although what activated the Cube remained a mystery, the result was pretty much the same as only the Magic Ceremony Cube could direct energetic particles to a certain spot.

Roland suspected that the red light was just an indicator, similar to a laser beam, rather than the actual radioactive ray. It was highly unlikely that human beings could detect neutron beams or high energy electrons with the naked eye.

Now, he unveiled the truth pertaining to the Temple of the Cursed and the mysterious death of the Thorn Town residents.

A civilization who had heavily relied on radioactive elements had created the Cube with magic power. The device could release energetic particles after being activated by enriched radioactive materials. As to why the beam could only travel 100 meters, it might have something do with magic power.



Roland was a little discouraged by this conclusion.

He expected to find something more extraordinary than this since the nature of this device concerned knowledge of advanced physics. Perhaps, the original owner of this treasure had never taken it seriously, but simply used it as another instrument of torture just as they used a whip and a guillotine.

This was probably the difference between civilizations.

Just then, Sean came in and reported to him, "Your Majesty, the Taquila witches sent in another experiment report."

"Give it to me."

According to the schedule, this was the last test.

They subjected different animals to the radiation for the same amount of time to determine the relationship between the body type of the animal and its radiation tolerance.

After that, they would terminate all the tests with respect to the Magic Cube.

Since uranium was a rare element, he should make the best use of it.

Roland opened the journal that was handed to him by Sean and took a sip of the tea.

It was in Celine's handwriting again.

The 30th, Day 19 of the experiment.

The experiment was finally drawing to its end.

The result indicated that the larger the animal was, the higher tolerance it had to the red light. However, at this point, I was not able to develop a specific formula to address this relationship. It might take some time for me to do so.

Also, I had experienced a little hiccup during the experiment.

The incident was actually kind of amusing. I planned to use the

remnant of the materials to see if it was fatal, so I directed the beam at a fish tank.

Five minutes later, I noticed wisps of steam that escaped from the surface of the water, although the fish were still alive.

That meant that the light was not even as deadly as boiling water. If I had continued with the experiment, the water would have been boiled and the fish cooked.

Perhaps we could use it to make soup?

"Haha!" Roland choked in his mug.

"What's so funny?" Nightingale asked in surprise.

"I almost forgot about that..." Roland mumbled. He had been too focused on the potential military application of the red light to realize that it was also a form of energy. Any form of energy could heat up water.

The history of the human civilization was, essentially, a process where men continuously developed different methods to boil water.

# Chapter 1119: A Real Researcher

---

Roland called the Third Border City and demanded immediately, "Ask Celine not to dismantle the Magic Ceremony Cube! I need to see her now!"

"Yes... Yes, Your Majesty!" The telephone operator on the other end of the line apparently had no idea what had happened, but still, he obeyed the order instantly.

"Take me to the Border City," Roland said as he turned to Nightingale. "As fast as possible."

"No problem," Nightingale replied with a smile and grasped his hand. "This may make you feel dizzy."

Within a second, they had stepped into the Mist.

Five minutes later.

"Ugh... finally." For a moment, Roland was at a loss as he emerged in the underground hall, with his hand clapping over his mouth. Nightingale had indeed improved a lot compared to when he had first met her. She glided through waves effortlessly and gracefully in the black and white world. However, to Roland, the trip was not nearly as comfortable as sitting in a roller coaster. He saw a blurred stream of objects streaking past him, his inside churning, and the whole world had dissolved in a grayish whirl.

Nightingale patted him on the back with an understanding smile.

"What's the matter, Your Majesty?" Celine asked as she slowly descended from the ceiling of the cave with a bunch of tools on her tentacles. "You were looking for me?"

Roland breathed out a sigh of relief after he saw the latter carrying a hammer, a saw and a file. He said, "Well, it seems I'm just in time."

He also spied a triden and an ax, failing to understand why Celine

would need them. Did she actually plan to grind the Cube?

"Where's the ancient artifact?"

"Still in the underground laboratory."

Roland took a deep breath and asked, "Are you able to replicate it?"

Mildly taken aback, Celine asked, "Are you sure you want to replicate it? Isn't it just a useless piece of junk?"

"Probably not completely useless." He then explained his idea to Celine, "The biggest drawback of steam power is fuels. If we could replace it with the Magic Cube, it may bring about a second industrial revolution."

The ultimate goal of industrial development was to search for an efficient and powerful resource. A powerful resource would potentially change the nature of everything, including their manufacturing process, the way they generated electric power, as well as facilities.

Nevertheless, this was not going to be an easy step to take. It was not a simple task of just switching a traditional boiler to the Magic Cube. The change in the heating method would subsequently change the thermal system, the control system and the related repair and maintenance. They might experience numerous failures before succeeding in this undertaking. However, it was, at least, worth trying.

"Heating up water... I see," Celine said thoughtfully. "But... it's very hard to replicate it without exploring its internal structure. It's a magic device after all, and you don't allow me to dismantle it."

"Ahem, what I'm saying is that you don't tear it down like it's a piece of junk," Roland said on a cough. "I want you to dismantle it in a careful, methodological manner for replication purposes."

"Is there a rough dismantling procedure as well?" Celine asked in

astonishment. Then she said in a pretty aggrieved tone, "You would get punished if you mishandled a relic back in the Quest Society. From the time I joined the Society to the fall of Taquila, I had never been punished. Lady Natalia spoke highly of me, saying that I have deft fingers. If I was so careless, there would have probably been no core instruments left in the hall now."

As Celine boasted in the disguise of a defence, Roland cast her a skeptical look and asked, "Did you use these tools to disassemble relics back then?"

"These?" Celine said in surprise. "How could that be possible? Didn't you just equip us with the new weapons? So these swords and axes are now useless. Rather than storing them away in the warehouse, it would be better to melt them down and use them to make something else. I still need some bookcases in my storage room. By the way, why do you think they're research tools?"

Nightingale turned away while clapping her hand over her mouth, shaking with suppressed giggles.

A little embarrassed, Roland replied, "No, I just fear that you'll get overexcited when it comes to magic power..."

"You must have heard it from Pasha," Celine said as she mopped her giant blob with her main tentacle. "She doesn't know the difference between a craze and a hobby... A real researcher must always have a clear mind to accurately control his behavior. It's normal for a researcher to work day and night or mumble while reading a book — "

Roland interrupted Celine just in time to stop her from rambling on. "Well, speaking of the Magic Ceremony Cube, are you sure you can replicate it once you know its structure?"

Celine replied, instantly back to normal, "That depends on how complicated this Magic Cube is. I can't guarantee you now, but there's a big possibility, because one good thing about this Cube is that it doesn't require magic power to operate it. This means the

biggest difficulty in the replication is gone."

"The hardest part is the replication of magic power!" Roland uttered an exclamation of comprehension.

"Exactly," Celine said while bending her main tentacle. "Due to physical and psychological differences, human beings, demons and the underground civilization use magic power in very different ways. For example, we probably could never gain multiple abilities by inserting Magic Stones in our bodies like the demons. Likewise, if I didn't convert to an original carrier, I would have never been able to repair the magic core."

"The fact that the Cube doesn't require magic power means we don't need to know what kind of Magic Cyclone that disappeared civilization once had and used. To be honest, we could never figure that out without relevant documentation. However, we now just need to replicate the object to achieve the same magical effect. Of course, this would still be hard in the Taquila age, but it's a lot easier now with the magic core which I can adjust anytime."

Celine paused for a second and then went on, "However, we still have another problem."

"What is it?"

"Material," she answered. "I've been doing research on the Magic Cube. Although it looks like an ordinary stone, it isn't made of stones. I don't know what it's exactly made of, probably of the bones of that civilization or some other solid materials. Anyway, I need a lot of samples... Yet you said earlier that the Temple of the Cursed was looted years ago. It was pure luck that we found this Cube. So, I don't know if the replicate made of a substitute material would work the same way as the original one."

"Materials..." Roland said meditatively. "Perhaps I know a place where you can find similar materials."

That area should have changed a lot by now. Roland gazed in the

southern direction. If the murals in the temple were telling a real story, perhaps he could find something there.

# Chapter 1120: A Cape City

---

"Here comes the ship, chaps! Get going!" Simbady hollered while wringing his fist in the air.

"Yup!" The Fishbone clansmen all swarmed toward the dock and commenced working. Some of them went to fix cables while some build springboards. Although everything seemed to be a chaos at the first glance, everybody knew what they were doing. These clansmen were as good as experienced sailors. It was unimaginable that just a year and a half ago, they had never been to the sea, let alone working on a ship.

The ship was quickly unloaded.

"Simbady, they say we can load the ship now!"

"Red or black, and how many for each, do you know?"

"Rest assured. I wrote it all down on the back of my hand!"

"Great! Let's begin!"

The word "black" was the term they used specifically to describe the black water of the Styx River, which was the only product produced at the Endless Cape. Nonetheless, as the mine gradually expanded, Sand Nationals found two more underground streams bearing two different colors: deep red and dark green. They were both combustible, only their properties and scents were quite different. To avoid confusion, they called the black water "black", and soon northerners adopted this name as well.

This was the fourth time that Simbady came to work at the Festive Harbor.

The first time he had stepped on this deserted land, he had simply wanted to survive the first three months and then stay as far away from this place as possible. However, much to his surprise, a city was gradually formed at the far south of the desert. If the revival of oases was a miracle, then the development of the



Festive Harbor was a divine bliss.

The reason the Endless Cape had always been a settlement to exile prisoners was that there had literally been nothing except perils and dangers. Even the most experienced hunter would not be able to survive on this land. Sand Nationals believed only Three Gods could build a town with hundreds of thousands of residents out of this bleak emptiness.

Simbady had thought the chief would eventually abandon his ridiculous idea after several fruitless attempts. He had not expected, however, that it was Sand Nationals themselves, who had been living in the desert for hundreds of years, were the ignorant ones.

There was something at the Endless Cape.

They had just never noticed it.

The first problem they had solved was water.

That official from the northern kingdom named Konkrete first took them to a large pond surrounded by numerous sheds covered with black films. They did not find anything unusual about it at first, but after the Months of Demons, they soon noticed white salt had come out of the seawater. Water vapor condensed into liquid on the films, trickled down a slope into a groove, and finally into a water storage tank. Water was collected in a much faster manner when heat went up. Although they could not produce much drinking water with one pond, they could collect a lot with several hundred.

As the number of such ponds increased, they now not only had sufficient water for daily use but also excess for the ships from Neverwinter. This technology completely broke Sand Nation's stereotype that there was no water in the desert.

The second was accommodation.

Apart from water, they also had to shelter themselves from the

scorching sun in summer. Tents were obviously not a long-term solution.

It was rumored that all the building materials shipped to the Iron Sand City were from the Southernmost Region when it had yet to be a desert. That was why there was only one city at the Silver Stream, although there were many oases.

Northerners taught them to use local materials to build houses.

They built numberless furnaces, fueled them with the Blackwater, filled them with dirt at the bottom of the sea, and then mixed them with sifted fine sand to make bricks. Since there was an inexhaustible supply of dirt and sand, soon brick houses rose at the Festive Harbor, with double-bricked external walls and ceilings. Although the houses were not shaded by trees like those on the oases, they were, at least, proper dwellings.

The last was food.

The elder of the Osha Clan Thuram instructed them to spread dozens of fishing nets at the beach, which would totally submerge in tidal waves when the seawater rose. Once tides ebbed away, many strange creatures would cling to the nets, such as crabs, sea snakes and sea urchins. At first, Simbady was too afraid to try these gruesome food. However, under the threat of a whipping punishment, he forced himself to eat.

They were actually pretty good.

Although Sand Nationals still relied on Neverwinter for staples, they ate much better than a year and a half ago.

With a place to live and food to eat, Simbady gradually changed his mind. After the three months was over, he made a choice that even astonished himself — he chose to stay at the Festive Harbor.

First of all, the pay was much higher than in the Port of Clearwater.

Also, there was another reason.

...

After the last ship was loaded, everybody packed up, ready to go home.

"Simbady, good job, man!"

"See you tomorrow, Big Sim!"

"I'm going to the marketplace later. Do you want to tag along?"

Since he had worked here for several times, Simbady had naturally become the superintendent for the Fishbone Clan and the first person Thuram would go to when there was a new task. He was flattered by how much trust people placed in him. Back at the Silver Stream Oasis, he used to be one of the most insignificant members of the clan. Few people would voluntarily talk to him, let alone seeking his instructions. But now, not only young men treated him as a leader but girls started to ask him out as well. Simbady felt grateful to the chief. His heart swelled with pride.

However, Simbady turned down these girls' offers.

Because he already had someone he wanted to ask out.

"Hey, wait for me, Simbady!"

When he was about to leave the dock to look for Mulley, he heard a familiar voice.

Simbady could not help curling up his lips. He turned around but his smile suddenly froze on his face.

It was Mulley, a girl with a black pony tail, who had always been so kind and generous to him.

After Carlone left the advance unit, Mulley stayed, which was another reason Simbady chose to live here. Simbady had thought with Carlone leaving the desert, he would have a chance to win Mulley's heart, but he had not expected Mulley would bring another man here.

And that man was not from the Mojin Clan!

"Mulley, you... and him..." Simbady stammered.

"Ah!" It seemed Mulley had just noticed that she was grasping the other man's hand. She immediately disengaged herself and said with an uncomfortable smile, "I wanted you to meet him, so I brought him here."

"Oh... r-really?"

"Agh, this lady is so strong," the man said, panting. "I couldn't stop her. She just dragged me here... Now I see how strong the Mojin Clan is." With these words, he studied Simbady up and down and said, "Let me introduce myself... I'm Rex, from the Fjords across the channel."

"I know you're from the Fjords," Simbady said, stepping between them, eyes full of alert. "I don't have any relics you want. You can leave now!"

In the past three months, the arrival of Fjords people shattered the peaceful life at the booming Festive Harbor. A large number of Fjords ships sailed to the Endless Cape, creating unprecedented trouble.

Those islanders who claimed to be explorers dug holes everywhere and purchased weird products from the advance troop, making the entire Festive Harbor boisterous and chaotic. Their sudden arrival did attract many Mojins to buy things they liked from their marketplace instead of from the Port of Clearwater, but these foreigners created more problems than convenience.

For example, one explorer had fallen into the underground river when he had tried to explore it. In the end, the advance troop had had to rescue him.

Another explorer had purchased tons of strange stones and metal wares from a Sand National with false money, which had almost caused a physical altercation between the two parties.

The worst one was that some of them had tried to steal the lifeline of the Festive Harbor — the special films on the sheds used for the water tanks. They finally had had to send for the First Army to settle the matter. The wrongdoers had later been escorted to Neverwinter and sentenced to lifetime heavy labor at the mine.

The avalanche of trouble made Simbady very suspicious of every single Fjord citizen.

"I'm not planning to buy anything. Compared to some shady businesses, I prefer to work my way up," Rex said while rubbing his hands excitedly. "This is a good opportunity to improve the reputation of the Society of Wondrous Crafts."

# Chapter 1121: The Most Genius Invention

---

"Huh?" Simbady twitched his lips, staring at Rex suspiciously. Even a clansman from a small tribe like him knew that Fjords people were notorious for their craftiness and trickery. They were all cunning merchants expert in sailing, who had an insatiable lust for money.

Many Mojins in the Iron Sand City had been scammed by Fjords merchants, so every Sand National knew they had to be extremely careful when dealing with them. Their stereotype of Fjords people was further confirmed by what had happened in the Festive Harbor. Simbady did not believe a single word Rex was saying. He said gruffly, "Are you done? I'm busy here. Go talk to someone else!"

With these words, Simbady cast Mulley a glance, eyeing her to come with him.

"Hold on!" Rex said immediately. "I'll pay gold royals to you, regardless of the result."

"Simbady, just let him finish," Mulley said, grasping his hand. "I find it very interesting. He doesn't look like a fraud."

Simbady felt his heart pumping in his throat violently as Mulley touched him. He said hesitantly, "But..."

"Ten gold royals! As long as you tell me the exact location, I'll pay you ten gold royals!" Rex said breathlessly. To show he was not lying, he produced one gold royal from his pocket and proclaimed, "This is the deposit! If you could help me, I'll pay 20 more. How about that?"

Simbady was stiffened for a second. It was unusual for a Fjords merchant to pay upfront, let alone paying 30 gold royals in total. Simbady quickly revolved the idea in his head. It would probably take him at least ten years to earn such a large sum of money with

his current salary.

"I also want to buy some new clothes for the children in the clan..." Mulley said imploringly while blinking her big sparkling eyes.

Unable to turn down Mulley's request, Simbady agreed resignedly, "I see. OK then. But if you dare scam us..."

"You won't lose anything," Rex confirmed quickly and tossed the gold royal at Simbady. "You just need to answer some questions of mine, and that's it. There's no better deal than this."

Simbady now saw how Fjords merchants tricked people. He caught the gold royal and asked, "What do you want to know from me? Why are you with Mulley? What do you mean by improving the reputation?"

"I have to start from the beginning," Rex said on a clearing throat. "Let's talk as we go. First, what do you think of the sea?"

"What do I think of the sea?" Simbady echoed. "It's the mother of Three Gods, the cradle of everything, and it's... volatile."

"I find it mysterious," Mulley said brightly. "Nobody knows how broad and how deep it is. There are a lot of places in the Southernmost Region not trodden by human beings yet. It may take us more than 1,000 years to fully explore the sea."

"You're both right. However, Fjords people view it as a treasury." Rex said smilingly, "There are numerous treasures down at the bottom of the sea, including tons of gold and silver royals, and the lost ancient ruin. Nobody is guarding them. They're just waiting for us to salvage. I won't be surprised if someone gets rich overnight. That means the one who gets the treasures will be the richest person in the world!"

"You sound it so simple," Simbady shot back contemptuously. "Nobody's guarding them? The ocean itself is a huge obstacle. How can you dive to the bottom of the sea as freely as a fish?"

"That's right. That's exactly what our problem is!" Rex replied in excitement. "The mission of the Society of Wondrous Crafts is to make everything impossible possible. This time, I want to show everyone that the Society of Wondrous Crafts isn't an organization of nutters, and certainly not an organization of cravens! Although we aren't explorers, we can do just as well as them... No, we'll do better than them!"

"I don't quite follow you — "

"A great invention." Rex revealed his secret anxiously. "I call it a 'diving suit'. With this, men can stay under water as long as they want like a fish!"

"What?" Simbady exclaimed in dismay.

"I found them stay under water for quite a while when I went picking shells at the beach. They stayed there for more than a person normally can," Mulley rejoined. "That's why I went to ask him what they were doing."

" So it's Mulley who talked to him first... " Simbady thought, feeling a bitter jolt in his stomach.

"I was very surprised at the beginning, because I know Sand Nationals fear and respect the sea," Rex continued. "I've been testing this diving suit for several days. It's been working really well. Needless to say, this will change the entire salvage industry. A job that used to highly depend on luck now become an adventure everybody could participate in!"

"Since you've already succeeded, why did you ask for my help?" Simbady asked in bewilderment, trying to suppress his disappointment and jealousy.

"Ahem... the thing is, Mr. Simbady... that this diving suit just needs a little bit of exposure. We can take advantage of King Roland's campaign to advertise it. That's why I need to get some real good stuff before anyone else — something that will catch the



King of Graycastle's attention," Rex said while clenching his fist. "Once I'm granted the honorary title, thousands of people will jockey for my invention!"

He broke off at this point and then continued, "But I don't know where the treasures are. His Majesty's post doesn't indicate what exactly he wants. Technically, anything strange or interesting is fine. Apparently, the king won't be interested in any random thing. He doesn't want to collect the crap you would normally find at the beach or in the corals, so we don't know where to go. All we can do now is to slowly search along the beach. Then I saw Miss Mulley, and I had a ray of hope. She told me you saw a strange cave once. You saw water reflect off light on a moonless night. I want to know where it is!"

In other words, these Fjords people came here because of the chief? Simbady said irritably, "I did see it. It's at the bottom of the cliff. The cave is only visible when water recedes. Having said that, the seawater is several meters deep, and nobody knows exactly how deep it is. It might only be an ordinary cave, and the light may be just a bunch of jellyfish."

"Don't worry. I'll still pay you even if we don't find anything," Rex returned.

They had just reached a beach beyond the port.

There was a knot of people.

"Those are the sailors I recruited who have nothing to do with the test. They only run errands for me," Rex explained. "I only have two assistants: Eyemask and Tophat. They're also members of the Society of Wondrous Crafts."

Simbady thought they had really strange names. He swept over the man and the woman at the center of the crowd and finally fixed his eyes onto the strange suit in front of them.

The suit had a huge metal helmet that did not coordinate with

the rest of the outfit. The top and the bottom parts were connected, making it very hard to wear. The most distinctive feature was two tubes sticking out of the helmet which reminded Simbady of two shrimp tassels. They were incredibly long, with the ends connected to a large black machine.

Simbady had seen the same machine on Neverwinter ships before. Sailors called it a steam engine.

"Is this what you talked about..."

"Ah, yes," Rex said self-importantly, "This is the 'diving suit', my most ingenious invention!"

# Chapter 1122: To the Sea

---

Three days later.

Simbady rose up out of the sea as the basket slowly moved up.

"How do you feel?" Mulley asked in excitement as soon as he took off the heavy helmet. "Is the undersea world fun?"

It was actually not any better than the desert. Although there nestled many weird animals and plants, he did not quite enjoy the experience. Every time he sank to the bottom of the ocean, he felt as if being engulfed by a suffocating darkness that pressured him in every direction. Simbady wanted to communicate his real feeling. However, seeing Mulley's anticipated look, he swallowed his words and blurted out, "Well... the scenery downthere is not bad."

"That's so nice... if only I could go down there and take a look," Mulley said on a sigh.

Looking at her hazel eyes, Simbady suddenly remembered that a year and a half ago when his clansmen had departed the Port of Clearwater for the southern end of the desert, she had been wearing the same look as she had watched them leave on the concrete ship. At that time, nobody had known what was awaiting for them. Everybody had been agitated about their uncertain future, but she had still attempted to cheer them up.

Somehow, Simbady felt uneasy.

"Good job. I'm really impressed," Rex commented as he rose up out of the water a second later. He clapped his hands as he climbed off the basket. "You have a good balance, a good vital capacity, and a good sense of direction. You're also able to stay chill. In other words, you have all the qualities an excellent diver needs. Is it because you're a Sand National or you're just a natural? No offense. Miss Mulley told me that you aren't the strongest warrior in your clan."

Mulley poked out her tongue at Simbady and went off to chat with Rex's assistants.

"There's a pond in the oasis where the Fishbone Clan used to live. When we were little, we often had competitions to see who could dive the farthest, so I sort of have some diving experience..." Simbady answered dryly. "But Mulley was right. I'm not the best diver in the clan. If Carlone did that, it would probably just take him one day."

"Carlone? Who's he?"

"The strongest warrior in the younger generation. He's an excellent hunter and combatant, and he's as good as those warriors in big clans. Yet he only worked here once. Now he should be working somewhere at the Port of Clearwater. It's too late to seek him now."

"Really?" Rex said, shrugging. "I don't think so though."

"About what?"

"I don't think he's stronger than you," Rex replied as he pulled off the diving suit. "The most important quality for a diver isn't skills but an open mind."

"An... open mind?" Simbady echoed perplexedly.

"That is, accepting the unknown and overcoming yourself. That's the difference between a pond and the sea," Rex said while gazing at the Festive Harbor. "This place is undergoing drastic changes. The man named Carlone has only been here once. From what I see, you're more open-minded than him. "If I asked him for help, I probably couldn't persuade him to dive in the first place."

Simbady rolled his eyes at him glumly and said, "If it wasn't because of Mulley, I would never have agreed to help you."

He had wanted to leave after getting that ten gold royals, but Mulley was very curious about this strange suit. Knowing that they still needed an assistant to salvage the treasures, she immediately

offered to help.

Simbady thus had no choice but to explore the cave with Rex. Before confirming that the diving suit was absolutely safe, he did not want Mulley to risk her own life and deal with this Fjord person alone. Although he knew Mulley would eventually participate in the salvage herself, it would be much safer if he checked the suit first.

"Haha," Rex laughed airily. "But you overcame yourself in the end and took a step further to the new realm, didn't you? That's probably why Mulley prefers you."

"Hang on, what... what did you say?"

"Didn't you find it?" Rex said while spreading out his hands. "That girl talked a lot about you when she chatted with me. She said you were pretty timid when you were a kid and was often bullied into crying. However, you were curious about everything, though you are now much more reserved."

A muscle in Simbady's face twitched. He said, "Well, she just told you everything, eh?"

"She probably feels more comfortable with strangers," Rex said, grinning. "But I don't really know much about Sand Nation's customs. Perhaps fighting capacity is a big factor to assess a person, but you may be too modest as well."

"You don't know anything," Simbady grumbled.

To be honest, Simbady did not hate Rex very much. It was incredible that within just a few days, he could chat with a Fjord person so comfortably, as opposed to the beginning, he had just wanted to keep an eye on Rex to protect Mulley.

Now Simbady noticed that Rex was not talking to him with an air of condescension. Instead, Simbady felt very relaxed when communicating with him. Compared to those haughty northern nobles and Fjords merchants, Rex was very different. Perhaps that

was the reason why Mulley often visited the campsite of the Society of Wondrous Crafts.

After a moment of hesitation, Simbady asked Rex why he treated him as equal.

Rex said thoughtfully, "You asked why... There's no particular reason. We've suffered enough discrimination and contempt ourselves."

Simbady was a little surprised at Rex's answer. As a person who promised to pay 30 gold royals, he should be a wealthy and respected man. Why was he discriminated? When he was about to make a further inquiry, one of Rex's assistants came over and said, "Sir, all the tests are done. We can go ahead anytime."

"Do you want to have a shot?" Rex said as he turned to Simbady. "You should have been very familiar with diving by now."

He fought down his curiosity and answered, "As long as that thing you invented works."

"Of course it works. I've been doing research for nearly 10 years. To make sure it will work, I bet everything on it..."

"What?"

"Ahem, no, nothing. Nevermind," Rex said evasively, turning away. "Now, we're going to enter that cave in the afternoon and start our first adventure!"

...

He chose to dive in the afternoon simply because they could have a clear view at that time when the sun was right above their heads. By then, sunlight would reach the bottom of the pond 50 meters down the water, including the cave at the waist of the cliff.

If they took actions in the evening when the water receded, they would easily get lost.

"I'm waiting for you at the entrance," Rex said as he put on a

helmet and gave him a thumbs-up. He then clambered into the basket and sank into the sea.

After around 15 minutes, Eyemask nodded at Simbady and said, "Your turn."

Simbady took a deep breath and put on a heavy helmet as well. Mulley moved over to secure the helmet on his head and then shouted, "You can do it! I'm waiting here for you."

He cast her a glance, turned away and walked to the basket.

The steam engine roared. As Simbady gradually dropped and got closer to churning waves, he had a feeling that the entire ocean was about to devour him.

For a split second, terror flooded over him.

However, he immediately regained his composure.

"Accept the unknown and overcome yourself."

He remembered Mulley's sparkling eyes and Rex's words.

Simbady breathed out a sigh and was ready to embrace the ocean.

In an instant, the whole world became a clear, transparent blue. Sun rays spilled across the water and splintered into flickers of light.

After he dropped 20 meters, the basket suddenly stopped.

A chilly, fathomless cave materialized in front of him.

# Chapter 1123: Underground Coffins

---

Rex, who had been waiting at the entrance, stuck out two fingers and pointed at his own head then at the mouth of the cave.

Simbady signaled him that everything was fine on his end.

Rex thus nodded in approval, turned around and walked into the cave.

Simbady looked up and saw the scuba hoses suspending above him. In the past three days, he had not only learned the basic operation of the diving suit but also diving gestures and techniques. It was extremely important to monitor these two hoses, and that was why the salvage required two people.

As a device to supply oxygen, the hose was connected to an air pump powered by a steam engine, which constantly circulated the air in the helmet. If one of the hoses was broken or clogged, the consequence would be fatal. Therefore, he had to be extremely careful when changing his direction or passing through narrow, treacherous areas.

Seeing there was no nothing protruding from the ceiling of the cave, Simbady threw himself into the darkness.

The sound of foaming waves was instantly muffled. He could hear the hissing sound of the air valves and the thud of his own heart.

After he marched around ten meters, the darkness around him grew thicker. Simbady could only make out an obscured outline of a slowly moving Rex in front of him as he plunged into this abyss.

Just then, the ground underneath suddenly rose, and the path started to ascend.

In less than seven minutes, Simbady saw the sea again. This time, however, the water was not glistening with golden specks but heaving quietly.



He followed Rex out of the water while holding his breath. A huge cave appeared in front both of them, most of which silhouetted against the darkness, with only a small part at the dome lit by a ghostly blue light reflecting off the glimmers on the surface of the seawater.

Was this cave connected to the world outside?

Simbady hoisted himself up onto the bank. He was about to take off his helmet when Rex stopped him.

The Fjords merchant took out a water-proof oil lamp from his sack. After observing the lit lamp for quite a while, he took off the helmet and said, "Agh... Looks like this place isn't completely cut off from the outside world."

"There's... wind?" Simbady said in surprise, feeling a chill playing upon his cheeks as he pulled off his helmet.

"Yes. There may be other exits," Rex replied hopefully. "In this case, there's a bigger chance we find treasures here. We're really lucky!"

Simbady cared more about safety than treasures. He did not expect to find a cave underneath the desert because the rock here was just too thin to form such a humongous cave. After all, this was only 20 meters beneath the water, and he was also concerned about whether the dome would cave in.

Simbady decided to report to Graycastle what he had found after he got out of here. Although it was a little unfair to the Society of Wondrous Crafts, he had to make sure that the cave would not pose any potential safety hazards to the Festive Harbor above it.

"The wind seems to come from that direction," Rex said as he placed his helmet next to the pond and raised the oil lamp. "Let's go take a look."

Simbady drew out his knife and followed him slowly.

As they delved further into the exploration, Simbady found the

cave became even more bizarre.

Soil appeared as they moved on, and grass gradually replaced moss as they marshaled further, giving Simbady an illusion that he was strolling at Silver Stream Oasis.

"Unbelievable. There are green plants here," Rex remarked in amazement. "I thought only mushroom and moss would grow here."

"Maybe... we should head back," Simbady said hesitantly. "I feel this place..."

He stopped dead.

"Feel this place what?" Having not heard anything back from Simbady, Rex turned around and asked, "Hey, what are you looking at? Wow, a flower!"

Simbady felt his chest constrict. Next to him was a beautiful little flower with pastel purple petals and fragile, delicate leaves. "This is... the Flower of Providence..."

"Is it very rare?"

"No... they used to be everywhere," Simbady said in a low tone. "I never saw it before, but I've heard about the legend of Three Gods Emissary. It's rumored that this kind of flower is coastal. Like a splendid purple ribbon, they used to be the most beautiful flower in the Southernmost Region."

"There were flowers... in the desert?" Rex asked in astonishment.

"It wasn't a desert here in the past. This land used to be covered with trees, meadows and rivers," Simbady explained while shaking his head. "However, after the departure of Three Gods Emissary, this place gradually turned into a desert. That's not my point. My point is, there's a detailed description of the Flower of Providence in our documentation. Once these flowers settle at one area, they will never grow anywhere else. That's why you don't see them in the oasis. They should have been extinctive now..."

"I see," Rex mumbled while clicking his tongue, "Perhaps the desertification didn't spread to this underwater cave, so the Flower of Providence lives."

"Is that really so?" Simbady wondered, getting even more confused. For some reason, he had a strong feeling that this cave used to be an oasis.

Meanwhile, the purple flowers around him became denser. Simbady did not think the presence of these flowers was a pure coincidence.

While Simbady was debating whether he should proceed with the exploration, he suddenly heard a gentle "crack" underneath.

Then a jet of flash erupted from the ground, creating a haze of light around him.

"What happened?" asked Rex in surprise.

"I... I think I stepped on something," Simbady said, swallowing hard. "It seems to be a plank."

"Is it a trap?" Rex said as he bent over and brushed away the grass and flowers around him. "Well, this is... haha... hahaha..."

The laugh reverberated across the cave, making all the hair on Simbady's neck stand on end. "What are you laughing about? Oi, tell me what it is!"

"Haha, treasures! We've found treasures!" Rex said vehemently. "Look!"

To Simbady's dismay, underneath the earth lay a densely-patterned stone tablet that emanated a soft glow. The light escaped from underneath his feet, making the entire tablet as transparent and luminous as a jade. The tablet was not as hard as it appeared. When Simbady stepped on it, much to his consternation, the surface of the tablet sank a few inches.

What was more incredible was that the dent magically

disappeared on its own after Simbady removed his feet. Meanwhile, the light also faded away, as though everything he had just seen was an illusion.

"Is there any more amazing treasure than this?" Rex exclaimed in exhilaration while stomping on the "stone tablet". "If I could send this tablet to the King of Graycastle, I'll be the honorary explorer for sure!"

"But... it's too big," Simbady said apprehensively. Judging from the part above the ground, the "stone tablet" might be even larger than him and Rex put together. It was definitely not an easy task to transport it out of the cave.

"We'll manage. I'm sure we can find a way to get this work. Perhaps we can look for some other exits?" Rex suddenly broke off and then said, "Hey, looks like there's another tablet here."

Rex took a few steps in the direction Rex was pointing at and soon hit another similar "stone tablet". In the soft light, more and more grayish white tablets floated out of the sea of flowers.

"There's one here, and there as well..." The two men tried to count how many tablets there were as they marched forward but soon abandoned this idea.

It was not long before they noticed that the Flowers of Providence were gradually replaced with those jade-like stone tablets. Light erupted everywhere as they proceeded.

Then a giant wall blocked their way.

"Oh God..." Rex gasped.

Feeling a little cold, Simbady slowly raised his head and saw a stone wall loom over him in the soft light. Then they found out that it was not a "wall" but a pile of numerous stone tablets.

Some of them were broken and some slashed in half. However, most of the tablets were rectangular. The random way in which these tablets laid on top of each other gave Simbady an ominous

feeling.

They resembled thousands of buried coffins.

# Chapter 1124: A Lair

---

"I think... we should go," Simbady mumbled under his breath after a moment of silence.

This cave was gruesome and suffocating, thus he would rather stay undersea than here.

The glow of the tablets mingled with the light of the oil lamp could only illuminate a small area around them. They were surrounded by an impenetrable and dangerous darkness, facing the unknown.

Neither of them had seen the edge of the cave yet.

"Go?" Rex croaked, a note of quaver in his voice. "What are you talking about? I'm sure that even Sir Thunder has not seen a scene like this before. Are they relics? No... this is definitely a ruin!"

"The ruin won't go anywhere. We can come back later," Simbady racked his brain, trying to find a way to persuade Rex to leave. "Your assistants and the Society of Wondrous Crafts are all waiting for your good news outside."

Hearing the name of his Society, Rex instantly calmed down. "You, you're right. We need to tell them this good news first."

"So let's go."

"Hang, hang on. I need to take something from here to show them proof," Rex said as he took out a dagger from his sack and started to chisel a tablet. "Don't worry, it won't take me long. You should also gather some evidence."

Simbady had no choice but to obey. After all, Rex was his employer, and since he had already accepted this job, he had to take some risks for those 20 gold royals.

He tried to convince himself that the cave might not be as eerie as it appeared to be. It was just a little bit dark, and there might not

be anything at all.

"Clink, clink, clink..."

Every time Rex wrung his knife, a clink that was amplified tenfold in the crisp, chilly air rang off the wall of the cave.

Simbady also noticed that the moment the dagger cut through the tablet, the light would become brighter and even blinding.

He shook his head, trying to put these thoughts away.

He really was not in the mood for cutting tablets at the moment. Several strange stonewares lay around the tottering wall, which Simbady judged were the tools used by the workers who had initially shipped the tablets here. Nevertheless, these tools were all rotten now after years of water erosion. He picked a few and crammed them into his bag as Rex had instructed.

"Clink, clink, clink..."

Rex was still focused on cutting the tablet and he already had five to six chipped stones the size of a nail littering next to him.

"Hey, I think that's enough..." Simbady urged when suddenly, he captured a discordant note.

It was also a clink but more squeaky and sharp, as if many Rexes had been chiseling the tablet.

"Is this... an echo?" Simbady wondered.

Then he realized this was impossible because both of them were still standing in the same positions. How could an echo suddenly appear from nowhere?

"Rex."

"Just a moment. This is the last one."

"Stop for a second..."

"Give me seven more minutes — "

"I said STOP!" he bellowed.

Rex was stunned, his dagger suspended in the air. The piercing clink immediately stopped.

However, that screeching sound still existed and was now slowly approaching them.

This time, Rex also noticed something wrong. He crammed his pocket with the stones, looking around, and said, "What's that?"

Just at that moment, there was a blinding flash in the distance.

In the dazzling light, Simbady saw the intruder. It was a full-grown desert scorpion, its clamps as thick as a man's arm, its tail high up in the air, leveling their waists. The tail was filled with green venom which, once someone was stung by, they would only have seven minutes to take the antidote.

"Damn. The sound of our knives must have startled it!" Simbady drew out his knife and said, "Step back slowly and fix your eyes on the scorpion. Don't look away."

For a first-rate Mojin warrior, a desert scorpion was not difficult to deal with, for scorpions were unintelligent and slow creatures. The only thing that might pose a threat was their venomous tail; however, this was also their weak point. If the scorpion failed to hit its target, Simbady would have a chance to slash its tail in half.

The problem was that Simbady was not an excellent warrior by any means.

Although he had received training since he was a kid, he had never participated in any hunting events, nor had he ever fought a desert scorpion.

He had no choice but to attempt it.

After Rex hid behind Simbady, Simbady said in a hushed voice, "Now, look down. Don't move no matter what happens."

"I... I see."

Then Simbady turned around.



The moment his eyes met the scorpion's, the scorpion lunged at him. Although Simbady could not see the scorpion in the darkness, he could clearly hear its clamp scraping the ground.

This was how desert scorpions generally attacked people: they tended to bide their time, waiting for the moment their opponent was distracted to launch their strike.

"Stay put!"

Simbady slightly bent forward, his right hand resting on the handle of his knife on the left, which was a standard fighting stance for Sand Nationals. In this way, he would be able to monitor both the area on his right-hand side and his enemy in front of him.

When the scorpion started to move, Simbady strode far forward and drew out his knife.

There was a flash of light.

He felt his knife hit something.

The blade cut through the scorpion like a sword through a suet.

With a crunch, the tail of the desert scorpion was slashed in half.

Simbady then stabbed the scorpion in the shell at the back of its head.

The scorpion soon stopped moving after a weak struggle.

"Impressive..." Rex remarked while heaving a sigh. "Now I see how strong a Sand National is..."

"Not yet!" Simbady interrupted him. "Based on the sound, there must be more than one desert scorpion!" He surveyed the cave, fully alarmed, wondering where his enemy was hiding. The cave was filled with illuminating stone tablets, so he should be able to see it clearly when it appeared!

But it was pitch-black.

Except for the area above.

Damn! Simbady suddenly realized what he had missed. He had forgotten to pay attention to any new light sources other than the glowing tablets.

As he looked up, a dark shadow dived to the ground.

It was aiming at Rex behind him!

With no time to react properly, he powerfully kicked Rex and sent him flying into the air.

The desert scorpion brushed past Rex and landed.

Simbady flailed his knife at the scorpion almost instinctively and cut the head of the scorpion in half.

"Whooo," he breathed out a sigh of relief. "That was a narrow escape... Hey, are you OK?"

"Aargh... I, I think..."

No sooner than Rex had finished, more clinks sounded from behind the wall. At first, there were just a few, but soon the sound became louder and more frequent. In the end, the whole cave started to rock, as though a giant monster was shuffling in their direction.

Simbady and Rex exchanged looks, pale-faced.

"Run! Hurry up!" Simbady yelled as he grasped Rex by the arm and dashed toward the exit.

A moment later, dazzling light erupted from behind, and the cave was as bright as day!

Simbady then saw a colossal desert scorpion, its eyes as big as a dinner plate and its shell as hard as coral reefs. Without a doubt, this was one of the legendary sacrificial offerings to Three Gods — the Giant Armored Scorpion that dominated the continent.

The light emanated by the wall of tablets now became blinding.

He now understood the reason.

He knew why grass would grow here in this dark cave and where the light he had seen earlier came from.

The cave was actually the nest of the Giant Armored Scorpion.

# Chapter 1125: An Exit

---

"Ah... finally," Simbady muttered in relief after they retreated to the pond.

He expressed his gratitude to Three God, the Son of the Earth and the Mother of the Ocean within himself. The cave was now completely lit up, which enabled them to successfully escape the attack of the scorpion. As the cave was narrower around the mouth, the Giant Armored Scorpion did not come after them all the way from the depth of its lair.

However, this did not mean they were completely out of danger.

Simbady still remembered the tidal waves of that gruesome clink and clunk, and believed that all the desert scorpions at the Endless Cape had probably gathered there, bidding their time to tear apart hunters who climbed over the tablet wall.

Fortunately, scorpions could not swim. Simbady sprinted up to the sea.

"Hurry up. Put on the helmet!" Simbady said as he snatched up the diving helmet on the ground and anchored it to his head.

But then he noticed Rex was not moving.

"Oi, what are you waiting for?"

"You... go first," Rex mumbled, turning his back to him.

Simbady stiffened for a second, wondering if Rex was still thinking about those damn illuminating relics.

Feeling a short surge of anger, he strode over to Rex, forced him to face him and bellowed, "Are you crazy? Do you know what our situation is — "

His growl stopped abruptly as he caught sight of Rex's bloodstained chest — The diving suit made of soft leather was broken.

"Your diving suit..."

"It's broken," Rex managed to summon a twisted smile which Simbady hoped he would rather not. "The last desert scorpion didn't get me, but its clamps scratched my clothes."

Simbady fell silent. If the diving suit was broken, seawater would seep through the crack of the suit and soak the helmet. Even though Rex just sustained a minor injury, he would have no chance to survive wearing a broken diving suit.

After a long silence, Simbady said, "If we abandon the suit and use the hoses only..."

Rex shook his head with a bitter smile and said, "That will only work when we're close to the surface of the water. Hoses won't help unless you can suck in air like a vacuum pump."

They needed two hoses to keep their balance.

Rex had told him at the beginning.

That was why he had been hesitant earlier.

Perhaps, he had already known it back in the cave.

Rex put down his bag, handed it to Simbady and said, "This is the tablet sample. Please give it to my assistant, telling him that I've discovered something that could possibly rival Sir Thunder's."

Simbady noticed that his fingers were trembling.

"Does your assistant... have a spare diving suit?"

"We've only got two. It took us half a year to select materials and make the suit," Rex said, trying to control his emotions. "I know what you are thinking. In fact, I've thought about every possible way to get out of here. It's impossible without a diving suit. Perhaps, that's my fate..."

"Your fate?"

"Members of the Society of Wondrous Crafts... could never be a

real explorer," Rex said while biting his lip. "Go, before the scorpion gets here! Let people know that this is my discovery. In that case, even if I can't become an honorary explorer, my name will be permanently associated with this invention and be remembered by every Fjords citizen — "

Simbady turned away and stared at the pond. After a moment of silence, he answered slowly, "No, I can't do that."

"Huh?" Rex gaped at him, astounded.

"You still owe me 29 gold royals. If you're dead, who will pay me that 29 gold royals?" Simbady grunted. "Only Mulley and I know our deal, and I don't think your assistant would pay me. I can tell from what they wear. They're just as shabby as Sand Nationals."

"We're just in short of money now!" Rex protested indignantly. "We went a little beyond our budget when purchasing the steam engine from Graycastle. Once people know my diving suits, the Chambers of Commerce will line up to buy my product. By that time, we won't have any financial problem!"

"The problem is, I won't have anything to do with those money, and probably nor will you by then," Simbady said as he dumped the bag and helmet on the ground. "Do you really think people will believe you're the real inventor of the suit after you die here? A little bit retelling could make the whole story awry. They could take the credit from you while reaping profits from your invention. So, not only will I lose that 29 gold royals but your ambition will never come true either."

"What... are you going to do then?"

"Accept the unknown and overcome myself."

Simbady muttered within himself and breathed out a deep sigh. He said, "Mojins don't like being owed, and nor do they like owing. A deal is a deal, no matter it's with the King of Graycastle or a Fjords person. I promised to help you, right?"

Rex was momentarily stunned. "But how are you going to..."

"Look at the pond," Simbady said while taking off his diving suit. "Don't you see it's getting smaller?"

It wasn't until then that Rex noticed that a few wet, mossy rocks had revealed from the surface of the water, which indicated that the water was going down.

"Tides are now receding, which means the distance to the bank has shortened," Simbady said, laying a delicate stress on every syllable. "If everything goes well, we only need to swim around ten meters before the rescue team finds us. It's impossible to do that when wearing a diving suit, but we can take off all our clothes, and you ought to get rid of the stones you collected as well. Now, take your clothes off."

"Take, take off my clothes?"

"Yes, we must stop the desert scorpion before the water drops to the lowest level. The most effective method is to burn it," Simbady said with a nod. "However, it's humid here and it won't be easy to set flowers and grass on fire. So, we need something combustible." He then pointed at the oil lamp and said, "The oil and the leather would do."

Rex lapsed into a long silence and said, "... Forget it. It won't work."

"Why?"

"You don't really know when the tides will recede to the lowest point. The higher the water level is, the longer for us to cross the pond. If we act recklessly, we may lose our lives," Rex said painfully. "And most of all, I can't swim! It's ridiculous, isn't it? A Fjords person can't swim. That's even worse than getting seasick. That's why I'll never become a real explorer and roam the sea like others!"

"I knew it a long time ago when we were diving," Simbady replied

placidly.

"Wh-what?"

"You relied on the basket to move about undersea. You couldn't walk properly in the water. Without this diving suit, you probably couldn't even get into the water, right?"

"Why did you still suggest swimming when you knew that I can't swim?"

"You don't need to swim. You just have to hold your breath. I know it's hard and you may pass out halfway. However, as long as you hold tight on me, I'll be able to get us out," Simbady answered slowly.

"Just by yourself?" Rex asked in disbelief.

"I've told you that there was a deep pond in the oasis where I lived when I was a kid. My friends and I liked having a competition with each other to see who could stay underwater for the longest," Simbady said while holding his head a little higher. "I was never the best in the clan, because I never put all my effort into it. I was scared."

"Scared?"

"Yes, I feared that the water would suck me in if I dived a little deeper, so I always came up a little earlier than I should. I pretended to be exhausted and out of breath. Slowly, I convinced myself that this was the best I could do," Simbady said while staring right into Rex's eyes. "You said I constantly look down on myself. Perhaps you were right. That's why I want to give it a shot and test my limit this time."

"Likewise, are you sure this is all you can do? Are you sure you can't swim?" Simbady shouted at him. "Are you not looking down on yourself as well?"

Rex balled his hand into a fist.



"At least you aren't afraid of the ocean. Compared to me, you're way much better," Simbady said as he curled up his lips. "What do you think? Are you willing to take a bet? You're an explorer. How can you be a real explorer if you don't take any risks?"

...

Two hours later, thick smoke almost filled the entire cave.

The water in the pond gradually went down and levelled the mouth of the cave.

They could hear the scorpions scuttle behind them.

Their clinks swept over the cave.

Rex and Simbady exchanged looks and knew this was their last chance.

"Let's go, Mr. Honorary Explorer," Simbady said after taking a deep breath, carried Rex under the crook of his arms and submerged himself in the water.

Instantly, he was fused with the ocean.

The memories of his childhood flooded into his mind.

However, this time, there was no Carlone or any other clansman.

He only needed to compete against himself.

# Chapter 1126: The Status of the War

---

...

Five days later.

Rex saw Simbady again.

In the hospital at the encampment of the First Army.

Coming with Simbady was a bright, dainty Mojin girl.

"How are you feeling?" Mulley said as she placed a bouquet of seaweed on the windowsill. "This is the only thing I can get here. There are no pretty flowers, but at least they are plants, which is better than muddy sand, isn't it?"

"Ah... thank you," Rex said as he straightened up. "I feel... much better."

"That's good. You scared me when you came out of the water. Your face went livid, your body spasmed violently, and you kept coughing out water," Mulley said, smiling. "Then you got a fever after arriving at the encampment. Simbady and I came to visit you twice, but you had yet to regain your consciousness when we paid the visits."

Rex said with a bitter smile, "I'm too weak."

"But you made it and went beyond your limit," Simbady encouraged, grinning. "Mr. Explorer, in fact, your desire to live is even stronger than I anticipated. I was about to shut down when we were almost there, but you clutched me with your arms and forced me to keep going." With these words, Simbady lifted the bottom of his clothes and said, "Look, I got bruises from your grip."

"Sorry," Rex said, a little embarrassed. "I don't remember what happened after we got out of the cave."

"You must be thinking about something at that time. Otherwise, you wouldn't have held Simbady so tight after you blacked out,

right?" Mulley remarked.

"Probably..." Rex muttered while nodding. "A lot of things came to my mind before I passed out, such as my invention, the Society of Wondrous Crafts, and my two wives who were waiting for me at home..."

There was suddenly a strained silence.

After a while, Simbady asked testily, "What did you say?"

"Two wives..." Rex answered with a look of dawning comprehension. "Ah, I forgot to tell you. The customs in the Fjords Island are different from each other. On the island where I grew up, you can marry as many people as you want. It's perfectly normal that you didn't know about that."

"I suddenly regret taking you out of that cave," Simbady replied, a muscle twitching in his face.

"Same here," Mulley rejoined with an expression of utmost seriousness.

"Oi, you don't have to be that straightforward..." Rex protested in a bit hurt tone and immediately changed the subject. "What about... that ruin?"

Simbady instantly tightened his manner into formality when they started talking about businesses. He said, "Nobody is allowed to enter that area anymore. The First Army put out sentries near the cliff to keep an eye on the Giant Armored Scorpion. I went back to the cave when the water was low at their request and retrieved your bag." His voice lowered to barely a whisper. "But I handed it in to the First Army... Sorry."

"No, you did the right thing," Rex said while shaking his head after hearing the account of Simbady's story. "Since the First Army took me to the hospital, they would eventually know about the cave. Plus, I've never thought of keeping the entire ruin to myself. I just feel a little sad about that two diving suits. Even if you tell

people the diving suit does work, few would believe it now. But there's nothing you can do about it... You did that to save me."

Simbady was silent. He knew how much time and effort Rex had put into these two diving suits. It had taken him half a year to make one and probably more time and money to conduct research before he had succeeded.

The loss must have given him a heavy blow.

Simbady asked quietly, "What are you going to do then?"

"Return to the Fjords and come back later," Rex answered quickly.

Both Simbady and Mulley were slightly surprised.

"Well, do you think that I'll lose heart because of the loss?" Rex said smilingly while looking at the bemused couple. "I probably would have quitted this job had I not escaped such a narrow death." He clenched his fist and then spread out his hand, in an attempt to feel something. "But now I understand I can do better than this. I don't mind spending another half a year making a new diving suit. At least, this time I know what I'm doing, and I'm sure it will be a great success!"

"Rex..."

"Don't worry. I'll come back with brand new diving suits within two years," Rex said slowly. "By that time, you and I — "

Simbady was now positive that Rex was fine. He was about to reply when the door was suddenly thrown open and an officer-like man strode in.

"Rex? Simbady?" he asked inquiringly.

"Yes, we are. Is there anything we can do for you?" Simbady said immediately.

"New instructions from Neverwinter with respect to your discovery," the military officer replied curtly with a nod. "His

Majesty wants to see you."

"Are you saying the King of Graycastle?"

"The, the chief?"

The two men blurted out almost together. It was unbelievable that within five days, the news had spread from the Festive Harbor to the new king's city of Graycastle, and it was even more incredible that the king had summoned them. He could have just sent for a messenger to inquire about their discovery. Did that mean that the ruin carried more significance than they had initially anticipated?

"That's right. His Majesty will dispatch a ship here, which will be arriving at the Festive Harbor two days later," the officer said, smiling. "Before then, please take a good rest at the barracks."

In Neverwinter, Graycastle.

Roland was sitting behind his desk reading a report sent from the front.

The "Torch" project seemed to go well. No demons had been lurking around since May. The railroad was steadily stretching on toward Taquila. Based on this rate, Roland judged the Holy City would be within the shooting range of the First Army by mid June, more than ten days earlier than planned.

However, the news did not make Roland feel any better.

The demons were the mortal enemy of the mankind. They had slaughtered the human race during the first two Battles of Divine Will and forced human beings to retreat to the Land of Dawn. The only territory the demons had yet to conquer was the Fertile Plains. Once the demons erected their Obelisks, the Red Mist would soon prevail the whole continent.

His eyes darted from the report to the map, straining to find some sort of clues but to no avail.

After the night raid, Roland had perfected the defense of the railway stations. It would be now a lot harder for the demons to destroy the encampment. Although the railway seemed to be the most dangerous place at first glance, the First Army actually had a greater chance to win if the demons chose the railway to launch their battle.

The railroad that stretched hundreds of miles was the demons' second major obstacle. In fact, the report showed that this was where most battles had occurred. There had been 46 battles in total so far around this area. Had Roland not read the report, he would have thought the demons had abandoned the idea of harrassing the Ministry of Construction and withdrawn from the Fertile Plains. Nevertheless, it was essentially not easy for the demons to completely cut the First Army's supplies right under the witches' noses and the scrutinies of the armored trains, as the "Torch" project was designed to keep the demons away from the railway. In fact, after the third "Blackriver" came into use, even demonic beasts had ceased to approach the railroad.

The last possible point of contact was the terminus station at the forest, which was also the one he worried the least. As long as Leaf did not provoke the demons, there was little the demons could do about it. The forest was too far away from Taquila, so it was impossible for just a small group of demons to hinder the construction. Plus, the forest had just caught a fire, so the First Army was now paying extra attention to that area.

As the frontier kept expanding, Lightning was now able to see the Taquila ruins. There had been no sign so far that showed the demons would send for reinforcements. Instead, their Red Mist seemed to be fading into thin air.

Every piece of evidence was now pointing to a fact that human beings would gain the eventual victory of this battle and have a chance to dispel all the demons from the Fertile Plains before the arrival of the Bloody Moon.

# Chapter 1127: Preparation for the Final Battle

---

Roland put down the report and remembered what Kabradhabi had told him.

The demons had an enemy from the Sky-sea Realm.

Were the demons too busy dealing with that enemy from the Sky-sea Realm to monitor the status on the Fertile Plains?

The General Staff was also inclined to this theory. No matter what the demons were playing at, at the end of the day, the party with greater power dominated the war.

The Magic Slayer had come all the way to the forest and caught Leaf offguard. However, this had also exposed his traits and ability. Sylvie could now sense him even without the Magic Eye. She could see a "red fleck of light" hover around the ruin and feel the slightest fluctuation in magic power immediately.

In short, unlike Neverwinter where the soldiers and witches were still continuously upgrading, the demons at Taquila had put all their cards on the table.

Since there was plenty of food, the Administrative Office started another round of conscription to recruit soldiers from all parts of the country. The consolidation of the administration institutions in Graycastle significantly increased public productivity. Based on Barov's initial estimate, the number of new recruits might very likely exceed 5,000 this time, which was the total number of the First Army soldiers two years ago.

Calvin Kant was very proactive in responding to this campaign.

After the officials at the secondary City Hall were trained and became comfortable enough to rule a territory, they would be able to recruit more soldiers.

Meanwhile, bolt rifles were gradually replacing revolving rifles, thanks to increasingly skillful workers. The new rifles were very similar to the weapons used by the sniper team, with the only difference being the lack of a scope.

Although the revolving rifle was fast, its speed, shooting range and firing accuracy were quite limited due to its mechanical structure. A revolving rifle would be a perfect weapon to kill a knight, but it was definitely not ideal to kill a Mad Demon who could spear at 100 to 200 meters. The bolt rifle, on the other hand, fixed that problem, enabling soldiers to fire from a distance.

The research and development for the anti-demon rocket-propelled grenade designed to kill the Senior Demons and the Spider Demons was now close to its end, and they had just started with the mass production. There was no technical difficulty in manufacturing this type of simple and cheap weapons. In fact, it was even easier than manufacturing bullets. Based on the current production rate, they would have ample time to produce tons of grenades before the final battle.

Although the First Army lacked related training on how to use a grenade, unlike a cannon, a rocket-propelled grenade was pretty user-friendly. It was indeed a very common practice to test them out directly in an actual war. Therefore, Roland was not too worried about whether the weapon would work.

No noticeable change had been found in the demons. Agatha and Phyllis judged that the number of the demons would be between 3,000 and 5,000 based on the amount of Red Mist, which was definitely a big number for the Union. However, for the First Army, the demons were exceedingly outnumbered.

Since the Red Mist was the lifeline of the demons, Roland believed this estimate was truthful and accurate.

This was also the information the General Staff relied on to make their analysis.



Roland trusted the judgement of the General Staff. There was no point of overestimating or underestimating the enemy, for evidence spoke for itself. He would rather place the matter in the professional's hand than issue commands himself.

Roland knew he was by no means a commander. That was why he felt a little unsettled.

He thus decided to wait as things came, quite sure that his every question would be answered when the war broke out. At these thoughts, he heaved a deep sigh, his hand uncontrollably reaching for his throbbing forehead, when a pair of hands gently rested on his temples. Nightingale started to rub his head with just the right amount of strength.

He instantly felt much better.

Over the past four years, Roland had reached a mutual understanding with Nightingale that transcended words. Such an understanding constantly reminded him that he was not fighting alone.

As a king, he used to picture a life of debauchery. However, when he really had a right to have a corrupted lifestyle, he realized his work just piled up. He worked way much longer than eight hours a day, and sometimes, even sleeping became a part of his routine. He did complain about overworking but rarely took a real break. Perhaps, this was because someone was always looking over him.

Obviously, he was working toward his personal goal.

But he was also working toward everybody else's dream.

After a short massage therapy, Roland's eyes traveled to another report on the desk.

This was regarding the discovery of the Giant Armored Scorpion and a mysterious ruin.

Although the information had yet to be further confirmed, from the enclosed strange stones, Roland thought the news was true.

He was intrigued by this report. He had anticipated that there would be some sort of relics of an ancient civilization around the Endless Cape according to the murals in the temple, but he had not expected that they would find them so quickly.

The tablets in the cave reminded him of the piles of corpses depicted in the murals. If that was really a ruin of a civilization thousands of years ago, these corpses should have been reduced to ashes by now. It was not likely that people would monumentalize the defeated party. So, why were there so many tablets?

All the samples had been sent to Celine for a safety test. Considering the enemy of these dead people had used radioactive elements as a weapon, Roland had to make sure there was no safety issue.

Apart from that, he was also very curious about its discoverer. The discoverer was not a Fjords merchant or any explorer but instead a member of the so-called Society of Wondrous Crafts.

Roland remembered the killed pilot Margaret had told him.

He thus immediately instructed the garrison at the Festive Harbor to bring these two people to Neverwinter.

Roland was burning with curiosity.

As for the Giant Armored Scorpion, Roland suspected it was just a type of hybrid demonic beast, which was the exact reason it was so humongous. As the chief of all the clans, Roland did not care much about the sacrifices to Three Gods. He would simply leave the scorpion to the First Army.

Just then, he heard a shuffle of footsteps, and then the office door was flung open.

"Is that the test result? Give it to me..." Roland said as he looked up, his words caught in his throat. Roland thought it was the guard who sent Celine's report, but much to his surprise but only to find a raging Tilly Wimbledon, her eyebrows slightly raised in quite a

dangerous way. Apparently, she looked very unimpressed.

"Um..." The next moment, Roland knew the purpose of her visit. "I have a few new Chaos Drinks here. Do you want to try — "

"Well... His Majesty, you have used this trick on her before," Nightingale whispered into his ear.

"No!" Tilly snapped as she walked up to the mahogany desk and leaned forward threateningly, her fingers splaying across the desk. "You promised to give me a glider in half a month. Now, how long has it been since you said that?" She stood on her tiptoes and laid a stress on every syllable. "Where's my plane, brother?"

## Chapter 1128: The "Unicorn"

---

Gazing at a reproachful and exasperated Tilly, Roland somehow felt his little sister was pretty cute in a way. Tilly rarely called him brother when she was in a good mood. She only did so in the presence of others or when she was really annoyed like now. Roland suddenly had an urge to tease her.

"Ahem, this isn't right," Roland thought, hastily turning his lack of attention into a hacking cough. "The plane isn't complete yet. Anna and Soraya have to make every part manually. As the war is around the corner, they have a lot of work to do. You should know it better than anyone else. I did draft the plan a long time ago, but I can't suit the action to the drawing just by myself."

As the railway continued to extend, it now took the "Seagull" three to four days to fly to the front instead of one or two. He could not really blame Tilly and Wendy for being slackened, because it was really hard to complete all the preparation work within one day. They had no choice but to wait.

As the pilot of the "Seagull", Tilly obviously knew everybody was busy. Many witches actually fell asleep straight away after they boarded the plane. For this reason, they had even added upholstered cushions to the chairs. Realizing that their most important goal at present was to defeat the demons and recover the Fertile Plains, Tilly deflated resignedly, her hands back to her sides. "I just want to test the plane sooner so that the Aerial Knights can do their jobs..."

"Don't worry. The main body of the plane is almost done. We just need a few auxiliary parts. All I need is just a little patience from you — "

"Hold on," Tilly interrupted. "You said the main body is completed, which means I can still fly without those parts, right?"

"Well..." Roland hesitated, realizing he had just slipped the

information out. Princess Tilly was now not so easy to be deceived anymore, for she had learned a lot about planes. "Well... you still can, but this new model is very different from the 'Seagull'. If anything happens, Wendy won't be able to fix it in time..."

His voice trailed off in the end.

Tilly's eyes were glistening with daring and excitement.

He just could not resist her.

Nightingale giggled behind him. It appeared that she really loved to see Roland lapse into an awkward silence.

After staring at each other for quite a long time, Roland breathed out a sigh and said, "Alright. I'll ask the airport staff to get ready for a flight."

"That's the spirit," Tilly praised, her raised brows back to their normal positions, grinning.

Roland picked up the phone and said, "Remember, if anything happens during the test or you lose your control, you must abandon the plane immediately. Do you understand?"

"Of course. We can always make a new plane but can never have an excellent pilot like me again," Tilly said confidently while folding her arms. "That's what you're thinking, right?"

...

At the Neverwinter Airport.

There had been nothing but two tracks at this clearing before, but now this place had become a real pilot training base, which was also the forerunner of the future air force academy.

In the enclosed testing field, a silver plane was transported from the hangar and placed at the end of the tracks.

Tilly took a deep breath and said, "So this is... the plane for me..."

"Yes," Roland said while nodding. This is the 'Unicorn'. It's

powered by a radial straight-five engine and can fly more than 150 kilometers per hour in theory. Even the fastest devilbeast would not be able to keep up with it."

As the first man-made self-powered aircraft in this era, the "Unicorn" looked very different from the "Seagull" the glider. The biggest difference was its huge head. To house the engine, the head of the plane was in the shape of a barrel rather than in a sleek aerodynamic shape, as though its top had been chopped off.

Also, it had a two-blade propeller attached to its head at the front, which the "Seagull" did not have. Since this was literally the first plane powered by a piston engine, it was still quite a basic model despite that the extensive research Roland had done. He believed a two-blade propeller should be sufficient considering the power was relatively low.

Finally, the plane was small in general. As the "Unicorn" was a fighter rather than a passenger aircraft, it was only nine meters' long, only half as long as the "Seagull". Nevertheless, the internal structure of the plane was much more complicated. Apart from an operation system, it was also equipped with some power units such as a gas tank and a fuel pipe. There was also room for a firing system and a second seat.

"The 'Unicorn'... You sometimes do come up with creative names," Tilly said as she rushed to the plane, but soon noticed something unusual in the flight deck. "That is where the missing parts should go, isn't it?"

There were two holes where the cockpit control panel should have been. It was obvious that the plane was not complete yet.

"That's right," Roland said with a nod. "These parts were used to show the speed and the altitude of the aircraft, which were the two most important flight dynamics parameters. We used to have Wendy to control the plane, so we didn't necessarily need them. But now, it's all on you the pilot, so you must monitor these two

parameters from time to time..."

"Don't worry. I don't necessarily know how to make a plane, but I'm definitely the best pilot in Graycastle," Tilly said as she crept into the plane and settled herself into the pilot seat self-assuredly.

The "Unicorn" was technically exactly the same as the "Seagull", except that it had an additional gas pedal. Even the power levels were positioned in the exact same location. Tilly had done many mock exercises earlier, so Roland did not think there would be any problems. However, since this was essentially a brand new plane very different from the "Seagull" in terms of weight, flexibility and speed, and its mechanical system had yet to be tested, there was a chance that something went wrong.

That was what Roland feared. If the plane crashed at the onset, even an outstanding pilot like Tilly might not even be able to know how well the plane performed. Roland had wanted to create several similar models so that Tilly could gradually get familiar with the aircraft and learn on the go.

But now it was too late.

"Your Majesty, it's ready to go," the hangar manager reported.

"OK. Let's begin," Roland said and left the tracks.

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

Two workers soon inserted a crankshaft into the engine launcher and started to spin it.

Roland felt like this was more like operating a tractor than the latest weapon created by human beings. He decided to invent storage batteries and electric helper motors once they started mass production.

As the piston gradually accelerated, one worker closed the pressure-relief valve, and the oil in the cylinder was instantly ignited. The engine erupted a few loud explosions. Within a second, a few inarticulate blasts became a series of thunderous

roars.

The two-blade propeller blurred into shadows and light. The plane glided along the tracks for a mere 30 seconds and took off. Under the scrutinies a group of awestruck spectators, the "Unicorn" soared into the azure of the sky.



# Chapter 1129: "The Mysterious Stone"

---

"Her Highness' ability... isn't flying, right?" Nightingale muttered.

"No, but she can fly with a Stone of Flight. However, when she's carrying heavy objects, even a Stone of Flight won't help much," Roland answered as he looked at the "Unicorn" hovering in midair. "What's the matter?"

"Although you talked about planes many times and also showed me the drawing and the internal combustion engine, I still feel it incredible... Men can fly like a bird with just a little bit of extra help," Nightingale remarked impressively. "The plane, to be honest, is none other than a bunch of metals and wood."

"Yes, it's made of metals and wood, but it's us who pieced them together," Roland said with a faint smile, "We used our hands, magic power, and knowledge. So, we don't, technically, completely rely on external forces."

"Everyone can fly like her, right?" Nightingale asked quietly. "Including me — "

"Yes, everyone, including you," Roland said positively. Nightingale was familiar with the sky. She had ridden on a hot air balloon and traveled with Maggie before, but these past experience was nothing next to a flight where you could have full control over where you were heading. Even Nightingale, a witch with magic power was awed by the plane. Roland could imagine how the mass would react to this new invention. Men's ambition to be free from the pull of gravity had started the moment they had stared up at the canopy of the sky.

The member of the Society of Wondrous Crafts killed in a testing flight was the best example.

The "Unicorn" landed magnificently on the tracks 30 minutes

later.

"How did it go?" Roland asked Tilly who trotted to him in excitement.

"This plane is awesome!" she said breathlessly, her eyes sparkling. "It's way more flexible than the 'Seagull'. Wendy's wind control isn't bad, to be honest, but she can't always manipulate the aircraft into the way I want. This is different. I can control everything, including its speed, diving angle and turn, like it's completely fused with me!

"Fused with you?" Roland was mildly taken aback. Although the "Unicorn" was inspired by various biplane models, it was essentially a very crude testing plane. The pilot had to use her instinct to adjust its flying speed and control the aircraft manually. Roland was actually worried whether this plane could successfully take off. However, in Tilly's opinion, this rudimentary plane was as advanced and high-tech as a modern fighter equipped with a fly-by-wire control system and a flight control computer.

That was probably the difference between a genius and a person of mediocrity.

"So... are you satisfied now?" Roland asked as he waved at the hangar manager. "That's it for today — "

"What are you talking about, brother?" Tilly interjected. "How could 30 minutes be enough?"

"Then why did you land?"

"To let you know that I'm going to be here for a while. You have a lot of work on your plate, don't you?" Waving airily, she said, "Off you go. You don't have to wait for me. I still want to try some other flying methods."

Watching Tilly scurry off, Roland shook his head in amusement.

The plane had passed the test, and he was sure Tilly would learn everything about the "Unicorn" in no time. Since Tilly could leave

the plane anytime, there was no need for him to monitor the subsequent testing flight anymore.

"It seems you were dismissed," Nightingale gloated.

"Shut up," Roland said gruffly while rolling his eyes. "Let's get out of here."

Nightingale disappeared into the Mist.

...

As soon as Roland returned to the castle hall, the guard trotted up to him and said, "Your Majesty, a message from the Third Border City. They've completed your task."

"Really?" Roland said, his brows going up a fraction of an inch. "Where's the report?"

"They hope you could see it in person."

It appeared that the discovery at the Festive Harbor was more complicated than he had thought. After a moment of reflection, Roland said, "I see. Let's go now."

Celine had been waiting for him at the underground hall.

"Your Majesty, you were right. There are materials used to make the Magic Cube at the Endless Cape," Celine said as she stretched out her auxiliary tentacle. "The magic power in that grayish yellow stone on the left are pretty similar to that in the Magic Ceremony Cube, though not completely the same. If we have a sufficient amount of the materials, I can start to create the replicate now."

"How much do you think you'll need?"

"A few thousand, I think."

Roland thought this was actually quite a lot. A couple of thousand stones could possibly fill a room. It seemed that he had to extravacate the Endless Cape as soon as possible. "I'll arrange it. So what about the other one?"

"The other type of stone is absolutely extraordinary. First, I can assure you that its radiation won't cause any harm to animals. From what I see, it's just some regular light, not the type you are worried about..."

"Radioactive rays."

"That's right. Of course, there is a chance that the radiation is too weak to be detected. However, if that is the case, I won't be too worried about its lethality." Celine picked out a chipped stone from the bottle on the right and handed to Roland. She said, "I asked Miss Lucia to break down one of the stones. Its ingredients are very similar to sand's."

"Sand's?" Roland echoed in surprise.

"Very strange, right? But it looks like a stone — or rather some bigger gravel. It's flexible and will glow when being compressed. I've never seen anything stranger than this in my entire life."

"Hmm..." Roland fumbled the sample thoughtfully and said, "That's not quite accurate."

"You know what this thing is?"

"Not really, but it does remind me of something else..." Roland replied slowly. "Substance is comprised of elements. Apart from elements, its structure also plays a big part in determining its properties. You don't understand it because you haven't seen many materials yet."

Take carbon for example. When carbon atoms had a tetrahedral molecular geometry, they would become hard diamonds. However, when they had a layered, planar structure, they became crispy, fragile graphite. One layer of graphite was called graphene, which had really great conductivity. When two layers of graphene formed a certain angle, however, they would become a perfect insulator. When they were cooled down to a certain temperature and were injected electrons, they would transform into a superconductor.

These three materials were all made of carbon.

That was the beauty of physics.

In fact, the exploration to the microscopic world was just a tip of an iceberg even by modern standards. In this unknown realm where men could only rely on theories, they were doing exactly the same thing that ancient people had done thousands of years ago. They reorganized and restructured elements to create new materials and inventions.

They found the "glowing tablets" and Soraya's coatings mysterious probably not because they contained magic power.

But because human beings just knew too little about the world they were living in.

# Chapter 1130: A Presumption

---

"We know too little?" Celine dropped her tentacles, looking a little distressed. "You're right. The longer I stayed at the Quest Society, the more ignorant I felt I was. The book you brought from the Dream World just blew my mind. I shouldn't say that the stone is incredible, because there's something even more incredible than that."

"What is it?"

"Us," Celine said with a faint smile. "According to that book, everybody is comprised of elements. Like a tree, we're also constituted of carbon, nitrogen, hydrogen, etc. However, we can laugh, weep and think. That's more amazing than just being able to illuminate."

"I read that book too, but I still can't believe it," Nightingale remarked on a sigh. "As much as I hate to admit, our skins aren't a lot different from scaly tree bark."

"That's probably what His Majesty refers to as the beauty of structures."

Celine looked at Roland, who did not respond.

"Your Majesty?"

"Hey, are you OK?"

Roland finally came out of his reveries. He asked blankly, "Celine, what did you say?"

"We're more of a wonder than the illuminating stone tablets."

"That's it..." Roland muttered, feeling something dawning on him. "The so-called stone tablets are not some sort of monuments, but they are people who got killed."

"Are you saying — " Celine said in surprise.

"The tablets were those people's bodies," Roland said slowly with

a shudder. They were indeed a type of new creatures entirely different from carbon-based lifeforms — they were actually silicon-based.

As the thought struck him, Roland soon found a reasonable explanation for the "illuminating tablets", and the murals in the temple immediately made sense to him.

First of all, why were the tablets so densely patterned? Not only the surface of the tablet was patterned, but its inner part was engraved as well. If this was an artifact, even Anna would find it hard to cut it so deep in a short period of time. According to the two explorers, those tablets were carved in exactly the same way.

However, if he viewed this matter from a different angle and regarded those tablets as creatures, that would explain a lot of things.

These engravings were probably "blood" veins. Under the blood pressure, silicon oxides produced a piezoelectric effect. Those electrical signals thus intertwined with each other and gradually formed thoughts. In the meantime, electric currents transformed into visible light through some mechanism so that these creatures were able to communicate.

Roland thought of the giant man and the huge pool of blood depicted in the murals.

Oil was actually more stable than water.

There might be a specific reason that the enemy of those dead people worshipped radioactive weapons.

Strong radiation would interfere electricity and might even render "electronic devices" ineffective. That was probably why the "radiation clan" put their faith in radioactive weapons.

Roland saw in his mind's eye how the war had begun.

Two entirely different civilizations had fought a fierce battle at the Southernmost Region for the relic. The blood of the defeated

party had formed the underground river and the Choke Swamp. As their bodies did not decay, they remained underground for thousands of years in the form of tablets. The party who had gained the victory had disappeared, leaving the slightest trace behind them, except the ruin and the Magic Ceremony Cube at the Cage Mountain. Roland could now only trace this distant history via the murals that survived years of frost and winds.

This was so unbelievable!

"The illuminating tablets are living beings like us?" Celine asked meditatively. "Forgive me, but I can't believe that this is actually true. It just doesn't make sense to me that those tablets had consciousness and could move about at will. Do you have proof of any of that?"

Roland managed to remain his composure. He shook his head slightly and said, "This is my personal speculation. The truth might be very different, because from the perspective of evolution, it's almost impossible for such things to happen."

Environment determined how lifeforms came into being. Demons and demonic beasts were, after all, the offsprings of the same biosphere. However, a silicon-based living being evolved in a completely different way. It was not likely that there would be two fundamentally different creatures living in the same natural environment.

"But according to you, that fits the stories on the murals..." Celine said after a moment of silence. "Let's put it aside for the time being. I believe as long as we continue to do our research, we'll find the answer. Only in this way will human beings continue to progress."

"Sounds very convinceable..." Nightingale said while twitching her lips.

"This is also one of the rules at the Quest Society," Celine replied with a smile. "By the way, I conducted some tests on the



illuminating tablets. I was thinking perhaps it could replace the illuminating Magic Stones, but it seems that doesn't work."

"No?" Roland said, frowning. When he had read the report, the first thought that had come to his mind was to use the tablets for illumination. Due to the limitation in power generation, lightbulbs were currently only used in the plants and a few residential areas nearby. There was still a long way to go before the mass could enjoy the convenience brought by electricity. If the tablets could be used for lighting, it would definitely make the life in Neverwinter a lot easier.

"Well, you can make it work, but it's too much hassle. Your Majesty, please look at this." Celine then picked out two samples. One was as thin as paper and the other the size of a block of tofu. They were both further sliced into smaller pieces. Celine applied some strength to both of them. Two jets of light erupted from her auxiliary tentacles. The light from the thin fragment was more dazzling than the other. Soon afterwards, the light from the former gradually faded away and stopped illuminating while that from the latter continued to illuminate for another half a minute. Ceine said, "I applied exactly the same amount of strength to the two fragments."

Roland immediately took the implication. "Its illumination intensity and lasting power have something to do with its size and the extent to which it's deformed."

"Exactly," Celine said while tapping her main tentacle. "The light from the tablet fragment will extinguish eventually. The smaller the fragment is, the faster the light goes off, and it will take a very long time to recover its power. If we want to illuminate the whole underground hall, we will probably need hundreds of tablets and place ton of iron on them. When the light goes off, we then need to remove those iron. That's going to be a huge project."

Roland thought he might be able to use an assembly pulley to transport heavy objects if he wanted to use the tablets as stationary

lights, though it was a little complicated process. He stared at the lusterless fragment and sank into thought. The smaller the stone fragment was, the easier it would be deformed, and correspondingly, the shorter the light would last. It would be almost like a flash —

"Hang on, a flash?"

An idea suddenly flashed across Roland's mind.

He immediately had a perfect idea to make the best use of those "tablets", although that might involve a lengthy production process.

This had been a historical problem for the First Army, which would just further impede their operations in the future if not solved in a timely fashion.

However, he now found a possible solution.

He could use the tablets to produce tracers that pointed soldiers directions.

# Chapter 1131: The Third Academy

---

Roland immediately set off for the ammunition plant at the Third Border City.

He knew Anna was not at Neverwinter at the moment, but he believed they could manufacture tracers with the current available technologies.

If he intended to mass produce tracers, he had to rely on factory workers rather than Anna.

Escorted by his guards, Roland entered the plant where all the workers went down to their knees, both excited and overwhelmed. Looking at the ecstatic look on their faces, Roland realized he had just made a rash decision. However, since he was already here, he had no choice but to hastily turn this unexpected visit into a tour of inspection.

After the exhilarated workers returned to their workstations, Roland immediately came up to the superintendent and said, "Bring the most skillful foreman here. I want him to test out something for me."

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

The mechanism of a tracer was simple. It was basically a bullet head filled with luminescent activators, accelerants and slow burning gunpowder, sealed with a tailpipe and a shard of aluminium foil. When the bullet escaped from the muzzle, the resultant gas would unseal the foil and ignite the slow burning gunpowder and the accelerants, leaving a bright, dazzling trajectory behind.

In the technologically advanced modern society, manufacturing tracers was not a big issue. All they needed to do was to add another assembly line. However, in Neverwinter where the development of industrialization was still in its infancy, it would

be a lot more difficult to produce tracers. First of all, luminescent activators were usually a mixture of strontium nitrate, powdered aluminium and magnesium, and barium peroxide, which meant they had to first create these chemicals before mass producing tracers. Roland knew very well the industry level of Neverwinter. Up to this date, the Ministry of Chemical Industry was still not able to guarantee a constant supply of machine guns and ammunition to the First Army, let alone other additional weapons.

The superintendant soon brought a worker to Roland. To Roland's surprise, he was not a withered, gray-haired elder but a young man in his mid twenties. The foreman went down to his knee in the same manner as a knight and asked, "Your Majesty, what can I do for you?"

Roland understood that Neverwinter was currently industrialized. Unlike traditional handicraftsmanship, the younger generation who learned faster than the elders became the main workforce. The development of technologies closed the gap between the young and the old. Experience was no longer an asset when it came to new production tools.

Roland noticed that most workers in key positions were merely around 20 to 30 years old, which indicated that Graycastle was facing a bright future.

Roland nodded in satisfaction and said, "I want to add something new to the bullets. Now, listen carefully."

Since the "tablets" would produce dazzling light upon deformation, all he needed to do was to ignite gunpowder to provide a thrusting force that would create a flare.

The mechanism was pretty similar to that of a punching machine. He would first need to carve out a gourd-shaped hole at the bottom of the bullet head and fill the hole with thin-sliced tablets. When the bullet left the muzzle, the expanded gas would push the slices into the hole. As those slices were stuck in the

bullet, they could not restore its original shape but remain in a reduced state. The tablets would thus keep illuminating until the electricity within was exhausted.

After hearing Roland's explanation, the worker agreed to work on the project.

The next day, Roland found a report on his desk.

The result indicated that the experiment was successful. After several attempts, they had managed to produce more than 20 tracers that left a clear, flashy trajectory on the screen.

Roland felt very encouraged!

Poor visibility at night had been bothering the First Army for years. Even with flares, it would still be hard for them to fire as accurately as in daylight. This problem would become even more serious when soldiers fired from above in the plane. Pilots would have no idea where their bullets landed from the sky even on a clear day. With a tracer to point out directions, they would then have a bigger chance to win the Battle of Divine Will.

Traditional tracers would actually deviate from their courses as the luminescent activators reduced. As they became lighter in the air, their centers of gravity shifted. As such, there was an old saying before tracers were widely used in wars, which was, if the target was hit by a tracer, then it meant you had just missed it. Nevertheless, the tablets were a better option in a sense that their weights would not change during the process. Roland only needed to slightly lengthen the bodies of the bullets so that they would work just as the same as normal ones.

The only problem left now was how many "tablets" there were in the Southernmost Region.

...

A week later, the two explorers who had discovered the ruin in the desert arrived at the Shallow Beach.

Roland further inquired them about what they had discovered down in the cave at the parlor.

The replies from the pair were consistent with the report. Before the Giant Armored Scorpion had appeared, they had walked a few hundred meters until they had reached the "tablet wall". They had no idea as to what was behind it.

In other words, they might have only found a very small portion of the "tablets".

According to the murals, there should have been tons of bodies.

Roland was also very concerned about the natural environment in the cave and the legendary Flowers of Providence that should have been extinctive a long time ago. According to Simbady, the natural environment in the cave was very similar to that of Silver Stream Oasis.

If the vast meadows had indeed gone through a desertization after the departure of the Three Gods Emissary, so should have the underground cave underneath the Endless Cape.

Perhaps, the legend was not exactly accurate. There might be some other hidden secrets.

Roland could not wait to explore the desert.

After the meeting, Roland had a private talk with Rex.

"Your diving suit is very interesting. The discovery of the ruin would definitely be a part of our history," Roland said while sipping his tea. "To be honest, I'm surprised that you actually applied the steam engine to your invention. Most people have no idea how to use it unless provided with instructions from our tech guys, let alone transforming it. I believe you're already halfway to the honor of being titled a lifetime honorary explorer."

"Th-thank you," Rex stammered in excitement. "It took me half a year to figure out how this machine works. I can offer you a discounted rate for my diving suits, if that pleases you — "

"No, you misunderstood me. I don't need your diving suits," Roland interrupted him with a smile. "I can certainly make a better one if I want."

Rex blinked in confusion, apparently astounded at Roland's reply. He summoned a really forcible grin and said, "Your Majesty..."

Roland talked over him, "I don't really care about whether you think I'm boasting or not. What I really want is — the Society of Wondrous Crafts."

Momentarily stunned, Rex said hesitantly, "I... don't quite follow you..."

"I know what you're trying to prove, and I can help you get what you want," Roland said flatly. "There are only two academic schools at present: alchemy and astrology. I believe what you're doing is very similar to alchemy. Both you and alchemists are creating new things for the mankind. So, why don't we set up another academic school for wondrous crafts and establish a society for this industry?"

Rex suddenly felt breathless. He instantly took the implication behind these words. If this was an offer from someone else, Rex would definitely think he was talking sheer nonsense or making fun of him. Compared to the prominent Society of Alchemists and Astrology Association, the Society of Wondrous Crafts was frivolous. Nonetheless, powerful and distinguished as the King of Graycastle was, he might be able to achieve what he had just promised.

He swallowed hard and asked in a coarse voice, "And what do you need from me?"

The king must want something from him if he planned to improve the reputation of the Society of Wondrous Crafts.

"Everything."

"What?"

"Ahem, no, I mean that you work for me," Roland corrected himself while clearing his throat. "Move to Neverwinter and become a resident of Graycastle. I take all credit for your work and will have the right to sell and use your inventions. You'll, on the other hand, gain fame and wealth, as well as an optimal research environment in return."

"I..." Rex did not know what to say. Although his work had been constantly criticized by the public and treated with utmost contempt, he viewed his every invention as his own baby. Most members of the Society of Wondrous Crafts would probably feel reluctant to abandon their research to someone else.

"I understand you need more time to think about it. Take a rest and think it over," Roland said as he rose to his feet and passed a book across the table. "Let me know your final decision three days later."

"Your Majesty, this is..." Rex asked in confusion as he took the book.

"Your reward for the discovery of the ruin," Roland answered with a faint smile.



# Chapter 1132: The Effect of the Reward

---

Simbady was waiting for Rex in the yard.

"How did that go? Is the chief interested in your diving suit?" Simbady asked brightly, who had now pretty much viewed Rex as one of his friends. "What's your reward for the discovery? Did you get the title of the honorary explorer?"

Rex shook his head, crestfallen, and replied, "He isn't going to purchase my diving suit..."

"Oh..." Simbady said, a little downhearted, but he soon encouraged Rex, "Graycastle might not need your diving suit, but the Chambers of Commerce at the Fjords will definitely notice your invention. You said the ocean is a huge treasury, didn't you?"

He did say that. In fact, he had anticipated a huge amount of reward from Roland. Apparently, the King of Graycastle took the diving suit very seriously, and that was why he had requested a meeting. Rex's original plan was to become an honorary explorer and thereby further advertise his diving suit at the Fjords Islands.

Yet the reality was...

He managed a bitter smile and answered, "His Majesty just gave me a book."

Simbady was frozen for a second and then asked, "What?" He peered down at what Rex was holding and said, "So this is..."

"That's it," Rex said, nodding resignedly. The book was not thick. It only contained dozens of pages, without a single word on its cover. The cover was neither gilded, and nor did it have a floral printing. Even a regular noble would grant him a better prize than this shabby, battered book.

He would definitely not gain exposure from this reward but instead become a laughingstock.

"The chief shouldn't be that kind of person..." Simbady said as he stomped indignantly. "Even I received 20 gold royals from him. You, as the organizer of this exploration, deserve more remuneration than me!"

Rex appreciated Simbady's heartiness. However, he knew there was no point of questioning the king's decision, because the king had offered to help him realize his dream. He was just being hesitant to take this offer.

Just at that moment, a guard came over to him and said, "Your Majesty has arranged accommodation for you. Please follow me."

"Thanks a lot," Rex said as he bowed and signaled Simbady to follow him. At any rate, he needed to read the book first.

Then he heard a strange buzz when he stepped out of the Castle District.

The buzz sounded like roars of distant thunders except it was little crispier.

Rex looked in the direction of that sound in curiosity.

He spied a barely visible black dot flicker in the distant sky.

"Is that a bird?" Rex wondered but soon denied this thought. How could a bird a few miles away produce such a loud noise?

Simbady also noticed this unusual phenomenon. His manner tightened like a soldier on heightened alert.

"It's... coming toward us!"

"Is that an enemy?" Rex said in surprise. "An enemy in the king's city of Graycastle?"

"I don't know... but it's definitely not a bird!"

"Relax," the guard leading them the way answered placidly. "That's just Her Highness playing with her new toy. I couldn't believe it at first either, but you'll get used to it."

"Her Highness'... toy?" The two men echoed, aghasted.

"His Majesty advised Princess Tilly to confine her activities to the testing site, but she thinks the field isn't large enough for a complete flight test. She can't fly to the residential area, industrial district or the Swirling Sea, so that leaves her with no choice but to fly in the Castle District," the guard explained nonchalantly. "But I have the impression that the princess is just showing off her skills to His Majesty."

They still did not understand at all.

However, Rex noticed that the guard took pride in what the princess did.

In a few seconds, that black dot drew closer to them with an earsplitting roar, and then Rex saw the most incredible scene in his life.

A winged metal artifact whistled past him, casting a vast shadow much bigger than a seagull's on the ground. From its enormous size, Rex judged it must be very heavy. However, this heavy iron beast was now soaring the sky. Meanwhile, he also saw a woman sitting on it, though not very clearly, and was positive that the machine was manned.

Fan..."

A name suddenly flashed across Rex's mind.

The Society of Wondrous Crafts was not an organization that emphasized distinctive properties of hierarchy. Rex had not been particularly close to Fan. He had only seen him fly during that open flight test. If truth be told, he was a little resentful of Fan. Because of Fan's unrealistic daydream, the reputation of the Society of Wondrous Crafts suffered even more scathing criticism after his test had miserably failed.

However now, another person achieved what Fan had failed, in a more flamboyant way.

Watching the winged iron beast hovering around the castle, Rex felt a molten wave of astonishment rise inside him.

...

The guard took them to a hotel called "Foreign Affairs Building" and said, "I'm Sean. You can come to see me at the Castle District once you've made your decision." With these words, he turned around and strode off.

Simbady had still not recovered from the shock as he muttered prayers to Three Gods under his breath and peered through windows every now and then, positively terrified, but still half expected to see that incredible flying object once more.

Rex, on the other hand, locked himself up in his bedroom.

He gazed at the book for a good 15 minutes as if hoping to see through Roland's mind before he opened the book.

During that 15-minute contemplation, he had revolved numerous presumptions in his head, expecting to see some articles introducing Neverwinter's customs and traditions, a generous job offer in the guise of a book, or even a blatant threat ordering the members of the Society of Wondrous Crafts to move to Neverwinter.

But he saw none of them.

There was only one line on the first page of the book: physical law of buoyancy.

"Any body completely or partially submerged in a fluid at rest is acted upon by a buoyant force, the magnitude of which is equal to the weight of the fluid displaced by the body."

Rex did not grasp the sentence at first. However, after he read it a few times, his eyes gradually widened with comprehension.

Rex quickly flipped to the second page where he saw a full page of arithmetic formulas. Each formula was explained in great detail to

help him better understand the concept. Soon, his eyes were glued to the book.

All these concepts, such as volume, density and buoyancy, were quite familiar but also strangely foreign to him at the same time.

They were no longer mere vague descriptions but concrete units and numbers, with which one could easily know via simple calculation whether an object would float or sink in water and how far this object would go.

Almost instantly Rex thought of the steel ships and hydrogen ballons sold to the Fjords, and everything seemed to dawn on him.

The book also introduced a submersible craft capable of independent operation underwater. Although it was just hypothetical at present, according to those formulas, Rex believed he could make it happen.

At the end of the book, Rex saw a huge, very strange-looking ship that could not only float on water like an ordinary ship but could also dive into water like a fish. It could accommodate at least several hundred people. Once it was submerged in water, it would be impervious to even the most furious storm.

Rex was utterly shocked.

He was also, at the same time, discouraged and frustrated.

Like a person who had just caught a glimpse of an unknown realm after an arduous journey and was about to celebrate his recent success, somebody pointed him the entire winding path to the unexplored world lying before him.

Rex was certain there was more than one flying iron beast in Neverwinter.

He now understood what the "reward" meant.

If he refused the King of Graycastle's offer, he could further his diving career and take it to the next level with the help of this

book. However, in that case, the best he could possibly achieve was the submersible craft, and he would probably never be able to build that submarine described at the end of the book.

If he accepted the offer, this book would then become a powerful marketing tool to bring new wonders to the Society of Wondrous Crafts.

# Chapter 1133: Shadow Tides

---

Meanwhile in the east of the Swirling Sea.

A huge fleet comprised of five columns were floating around the Shadow Islands.

The most distinctive ship among them was the "Snow Wind", its colossal black iron body and the dark smoke billowing from the chimney standing out from all the other ships.

The deck of the "Snow Wind" was now teeming with busy sailors.

They were all running back and forth to make final preparation for the journey to the islands.

Thunder was instructing his team at the bridge, "You're all great explorers at the Fjords. Many of you have been to the Shadow Waters, so I'll make it short. These islands are not stationary. It will be really foggy there when the water rises. So, you have to be extremely careful, understand?"

"Captain, don't worry," a first mate promised as he patted his chest. "I've been working with you for years. When did you see me make a mistake? I'm more worried about the four Chambers of Commerce. They have a higher chance to make errors."

"That's right. It wouldn't be that easy to maneuver three-masted ships through those underwater reefs. It would be much safer if they ride on small boats."

"They probably think their giant ships are as nimble as the 'Snow Wind'. We aren't going to help them if they hit a rock!"

Everybody guffawed with laughter.

"If they're worried that we're going to keep treasures to ourselves, just ask their captains to hop on our ship!"

"Those Chambers of Commerce apparently want to butt in on us!"

"I told you they're all old cunning farts."

"But if we want to go further in the east, we have to have a huge fleet. There's nothing we can do about it."

Watching the roving mob, Camilla Dary heaved an almost inaudible sigh. Over the past one month, she had gained a basic understanding of the Shadow Waters. It appeared that this area was the center of the Swirling Sea where tides originated. The water level changed drastically when tides rose and receded. When water went down, thousands of reefs floated up above the surface of the water and formed numerous individual islands. The tides at the Sleeping Island were nothing compared to the ones here.

What was more incredible was that there had not been a single map of Shadow Islands up to this date despite that it had been discovered more than a decade ago. The reason for that was that the hidden rocks around here were constantly moving, including that enormous ruin. They had to wait for all the rocks to come out of the surface before crossing the ocean. Because of that, it was extremely hard to sail through this area.

However, these sailors looked more like a group of ferocious bandits than professional explorers. Explorers were highly respected among Fjords people, but among explorers themselves, they rarely respected each other. Most explorers preferred to act alone, who rarely took orders from others unless the other party was seemingly influential like Thunder.

As a former noble, Camila felt slightly disgusted about the jeers and boos. She would never have joined these people with Joan had this not been an order from Princess Tilly.

She was surprised that she started to miss the First Army in Neverwinter. At least, the soldiers of the First Army maintained absolute silence when they carried out a mission. They always stood erect, with a brisk and crisp air that afforded a pleasant vista to contemplate.



Camila thus quietly left the command room at the bridge for the deck.

She immediately spotted Joan who was playing at the stern of the ship, accompanied by Ms. Margaret.

At the sight of Camila, Joan immediately sought refuge from Margaret, only poking half of her head out.

Camila felt a little dispirited. Joan got along fairly well with the witches back in Neverwinter and had even made friends with Maggie and Lightning. She did not understand why Joan would not accept her like she accepted everybody else. She had known Joan for a very long time, longer than anyone except Margaret.

Margaret asked smilingly, "What's the matter? Not in a good mood?" She pointed at her own lips and said, "Your face gave you away."

"No," Camila said distractedly. "I'm just..."

"You don't like the atmosphere in the command room, right?" Margaret said as if having seen through her mind. "I told you not to worry about the exploration. Leave it to the guys. You just relax and enjoy this trip."

"How can I?" Camila replied, her brows furrowed. "I can't place my life in their hands."

"You don't trust Thunder?"

"I..."

Margaret held her hand and paced to the railing. "I admire your sense of responsibility, otherwise Lady Tilly would not entrust the Sleeping Island to you. However, sometimes, you need to learn to trust people, not only Thunder but also Lady Tilly..."

"How can I not trust Princess Tilly?" Camila thought but remained silent all the same. She had been opposed to their relocation to Neverwinter from the beginning.

"You would go crazy if you're always so strained on the sea," Margaret went on. "They can be boisterous, but I can assure you they're all excellent sailors."

Camila finally got a chance to cut in, "Just a disclaimer, I didn't say anything..."

"But you're thinking that way, right?" Margaret talked over her. "Haha, that's OK. The nobles in the Four Kingdoms view us as barbarians, and we view Mojins just as the nobles view us. To be honest, I only see one noble who never discriminates people based on background."

That was Roland Wimbledon.

As much as Camila hated to admit it, this was the name that came to her mind.

Roland had openly claimed to support witches four years ago.

Camila now had no reason whatsoever to believe that Roland was plotting something, because the very witch he had rescued back then had now become the Queen of Graycastle.

Did she just need to put more faith in him?

While Camila was lost in thought, the ocean started to roar at a distance, as though molten waves were foaming and thousands of fishes swarming toward them. Camila was not sure whether this was her hallucination, for from what she could see, the sea was still perfectly tranquil.

"The water is going down," Margaret murmured.

"Ya... Ya..." Joan squeaked, tugging Margaret's sleeves nervously.

Around 15 minutes later, Camila saw changes.

A pointy stone started to rise from the surface of the water, and then more stones appeared. Rather than islands, what she saw was a sea of rocks and boulders. After the water dropped five meters, Camila saw reefs gradually reveal themselves underneath those

stone pillars.

She held her breath.

This was her first time to see such an amazing scene. As the water level plummeted, the horizon seemed to be floating above the islands. Camila knew this was just a trick of the eye. Now the entire Shadow Waters transformed into a slope, with the horizon being the crest of the hill.

In spite of all of these changes, the sea was still surprisingly serene and motionless.

After around two hours, mists started to rise around the islands, and the Shadow Waters finally unveiled its mask, showing its true nature.

# Chapter 1134: Plunge into the Sea

---

"Woo—woo—"

The "Snow Wind" produced a low, deep whistle.

That was the sailing signal.

The first four ships at the front set their sails and left the fleet.

The ships of the four Chambers of Commerce, including Crescent Moon Bay, Sunset Island, Shallow Water Town and Twin Dragon Island, followed the "Snow Wind" into the Shadow Waters.

Their vision blurred and sunlight became dismal. They had entered an entirely different world after sailing 1,000 meters.

The deck was now shrouded in thick mist. Camilla noticed that the ship had stopped wobbling.

"What happened?"

"Don't worry. The engine is off," Margaret answered. "The trick to safely pass through this area is to be low. Maybe it doesn't apply to small boats, but for a large ship like this, we just need to glide over the slope. Look around."

Camila looked in the direction Margaret pointed at and saw all the ships from the Chambers of Commerce had lowered their sails to half-mast, some of which were facing each other, which was definitely not a scene normally seen during a regular voyage.

Also, a brazer had been set up at both the bow and stern of each ship to mark the ship's location. Even so, Camila could only see two ships looming against the fog, the third one completely out of sight in the depths of the mist. The faint firelights flickered ominously, and the fourth ship seemed to have totally disappeared in the mist.

"Are we going downhill?" Camila asked suspiciously. After living in the Sleeping Island for a while, she had learned something about

the ocean. When the seawater rose in submerged caves and cracks, whirlpools would emerge on the surface of the water. The smaller ones were one-finger wide, whereas the larger ones could be a few meters. However, at any rate, the water would be directed to the center of the whirlpools and spun faster as it drew close to the vortex.

Camilla had thought it was the vast vista of the ocean that made the movement of water currents indiscernible. However, now the fleet had reached the depth of the Shadow Waters, so she should see something happen.

Much to her dismay, some algae was drifting off on the surface of the water!

This indicated that the water currents did not alter their directions at all, at least not here!

"It looks incredible, but that's the fact," Margaret said, nodding. "If there was a huge whirlpool here when tides receded, we wouldn't have come here, because that would be the largest and deepest whirlpool in the ocean. There would be no chance of survival. Since the ocean remains surprisingly tranquil, Thunder wants to look into this matter." Margaret broke off and looked at Joan who was now gazing at the sea. "Normally, it was impossible for human beings to dive to the bottom of the sea, but your ability gives us a ray of hope."

Camilla looked around, her eyes darting from the surrounding wet stone pillars and reefs, feeling a jolt of panic rise from her stomach. She could see the stones around her clearly. However, for the rocks farther away, she could only catch a glimpse of their silhouettes in various shades. They somehow reminded her of many grisly, outstretched clawed hands that usually appeared in a nightmare.

"Ya! Fish! Red fish!" Joan squeaked suddenly.

Camila turned around and saw a bright red "river" emerge

abruptly on the right side of the "Snow Wind". Although Thunder had told her about it earlier, the sudden appearance of the river still shocked her.

"The Ghost Shadow Red River."

A special river comprised of fishes.

"Oh, stop clicking your tongue. red scaly fish isn't tasty," Margaret said as she patted Joan on the head. "As long as we marshal along the Ghost Shadow Red River, we'll reach the triangular tower ruin. Princess Tilly should have told you already. There's a weird telescope-like instrument in the tower, through which you'll be able to see a vast land you've never laid your eyes on. That's the purpose of this trip."

"That's what she told me."

"Unfortunately, we're not going to the ancient ruin this time, otherwise you'll be able to see that magnificent ruin," Margaret said in a sorrowful tone.

"No... I'm fine with that," Camila replied briskly. She would rather not visit this area ever again.

"Your reaction is exactly the opposite of Her Highness'," Margaret said, giggling.

After another two hours, the "Snow Wind" staggered to a halt before a large reef island, followed by the three-masted ships of the four Chambers of Commerce. After all the ships anchored, all the captains gathered around on the deck of the "Snow Wind".

"Wow, everyone's here. Very impressive," the first mate of the "Snow Wind" remarked scathingly while twitching his lips. "I thought you would run into a rock and ask us for help in tears."

"You're not the only good sailor and captain here," the members of the four Chambers of Commerce shot back. "The steel ship is great, but I'm not sure about the crews on it."

"Enough!" Thunder interjected. "I'm glad everybody has made it. Did you come across any problems on the way here?"

"No," the superintendents of the Chambers of Commerce replied. "Nothing happened, not even a Sea Ghost. It was extraordinarily quiet this time."

"I'm surprised too. Normally there'll be a few poor lads dragged down into the water by Sea Ghosts."

"Is it because we chose a different route and avoided the ancient ruin? Does that mean those monsters prefer the ruin to be their lair?"

"It looks like so."

Thunder thought for a while and waved everybody into silence. He then said, "In that case, let's get going. The water will rise up again in the evening, so we'd better reach the bottom of the sea by then. If there's nothing down there, we must leave before tides come, otherwise we'll get stuck here on the islands." With these words, he looked at the two witches and said, "Joan, Ms. Camilla, we'll place the matter in your hands."

"Ya," Joan said, nodding with a serious look.

"As long as you can ask those guys to shut up," Camilla grumbled as she swept over the explorer with a cold glance. "Just a disclaimer. I need to be highly concentrated when I channel Joan. If anyone interrupt my work, I'll have to start all over again!"

After Thunder promised her there would be no interruption, Camilla put her hand on Joan's shoulder and closed her eyes. She felt a surge of dizziness, and then she saw what Joan was seeing.

"Off you go," Camilla said within herself. "If we're disconnected or you are in danger, come back as soon as possible, OK? Don't force yourself. Your friends are waiting for you."

Hearing the word "friends", Joan shuddered imperceptibly, and her eyes became determined. "Got it, ya!" she said resolutely.

Joan then jumped backwards into the sea.

Camilla instantly felt a cooling sensation.

All her fatigue was gone.

But she knew this was just an illusion. That was what Joan felt, and she was simply channeling Joan's feeling.

"How does that go?" Thunder asked.

"Everything is going well. Joan's now 50 meters down the water," Camilla replied. "The stone pillars aren't getting any thicker, and nor are the reefs... I haven't seen any seabeds or mountains yet."

This was her task. Although Joan could see everything underwater, she could not put them into words. The only way to know what she saw was through channeling."

"She's now more than 100 meters down there. The surroundings are significantly darker, but she can still see everything clearly. There are still stone pillars and reefs. We haven't reached the bottom yet," Camilla muttered. "Damn, that's so deep. Perhaps those islands and rocks aren't real islands but are..."

"Are what?" somebody questioned.

Camilla swallowed hard and answered, "Are just larger stone pillars."



# Chapter 1135: A Drastic Change

---

"The Swirling Sea is huge. It's perfectly normal that it has some strange geographical features," Thunder said after a moment of silence. "I've seen weathered rocky mountains in the Kingdom of Wolfheart. They're pretty similar to those stone pillars although they're not that long."

"But unlike the land, there's no wind underwater..." Camilla left her words unsaid.

"Wind?" Joan's voice suddenly popped up in Camilla's head. "There's wind here."

"What did you say?" Camilla asked quickly.

"Um, didn't I make that clear?" Thunder replied with a cough. "Then I'll repeat... Back in the Kingdom of Wolfheart, I saw —"

"Not you. I was asking Joan!" Camilla snapped. She knew she was being rude, but she had no choice and had to interrupt Thunder. "Joan just said something... There's wind at the bottom of the sea!"

The spectators on the deck were all mildly taken aback.

"I can't feel it, but I can hear it... Listen, did you hear that?"

Camilla immediately concentrated. She knew as the channeling witch, she could hear whatever Joan heard. Instantly, she heard wind howl down the water just as air whistled out from a crack.

"I'll dive further," Joan said. "But I have to change my position."

With these words, she untied her dress and her legs made contact with the water. Blue scales started to emerge from her ankles and crept up her legs. She now had a mermaid tail.

Suddenly, Camilla felt all the pressure weighing upon her vanish. She marveled at how far and fast the tail propelled her through water. She swam even faster than a fish.

This was what Joan really looked like!

Joan dived even faster.

"200 meters deep, and the wind seems to be louder... Still nothing has changed undersea."

"400 meters. It's completely dark. Luckily, Joan doesn't need light to see things. The stone pillars... are still deeper down there, and there are now new pillars."

"Could you stretch the rope a little farther?"

"Damn it, how deep is the water now? 600 or 800? Joan isn't sure. However, the stone pillars — " Camilla broke off. "No, that's... impossible..."

"What's the matter?" Thunder asked.

Camilla felt an ineffable chill run down her spine. "The pillars, the pillars... disappeared!"

"Disappeared? As in it vanished?" Thunder pursued, his brows furrowed as he turned around to look at the sea. The reefs were still there.

Camilla held her own trembling hands and said, "There's no seabed... nothing... They're suspended in the water!"

Everybody gasped.

Through Joan's eyes, Camilla only saw the upper part of those stone pillars floating in the water. Their lower parts looked completely chopped off by some invisible force. Large reefs were simply suspended in the middle of the ocean in a creepy sort of way.

This was beyond the scope of her understanding.

"Suspended? Are you saying these islands are floating on the water?"

"By the name of the Three Gods, they're all solid rock!"

"Woman, are you sure about what you see?"

"That's impossible. Even if they're floating, they can't remain in the same position all the time. Without an anchor, the water currents would flush the Shadow Islands toward the Fjords!"

The deck exploded with discussion.

"Silence!" Thunder hollered at the crowd and they immediately became quiet. "Are all the reefs floating like that?"

"I don't know... They're in different lengths," Camilla mumbled. "We haven't reached the very bottom of those pillars yet."

Meanwhile, Joan slowed down.

Even as a mermaid, Joan had a limit.

Just then, Camilla noticed a weird phenomenon.

Some pillars near Joan seemed to be stretched.

Those pillars were like tree trunks as they went straight down to the bottom of the ocean. Their ends were out of sight due to the darkness, and it was hard for Camilla to tell how long they actually were. What caught her attention was the patterns on the pillars and some barnacles attached to them. The pillars started to elongate at some point in the middle, whereas the barnacles, which supposed to be in a round shape, turned oval. They looked particularly strange compared to the normal pillars and barnacles a few meters away.

"Do you want to take a closer look?" asked Joan, who sensed Camilla's bewilderment. "They do look weird."

"OK," Camilla said while clearing her throat. "Be careful."

Joan started to slowly draw close to a pillar and stretched out her hand to touch the strange barnacles. Suddenly, something horrible happened.

Camilla saw Joan's scaly fingers elongate.

"What's going on?" Joan stretched out her hands in confusion. "Is this an illusion?"

Camilla suddenly had a sense of foreboding.

Just when Camilla was about to inform Thunder, Joan stopped moving and stared at a fish that streaked past her nose.

It was just a silvery eel that was about an arm's length long. However, when it passed the mermaid girl, it instantly stretched to around five meters and turned into something like a "sea snake" that instantly plummeted to the bottom of the sea. Within a few seconds, the silvery eel was stretched to its maximum and its tail was still in Joan's sight, but its head was already lost in the darkness. By that point, the eel was more than 100 meters in length! Within a blink of an eye, it disappeared in the sea with a flash of silver. It was as if it was sucked into something!

All the little hairs on the back of Camilla's neck stood up!

She yelled, "Get out of there! The exploration is over. Come back!"

But it was too late.

Joan struggled and her upper body still in the same position, but her tail was being horribly stretched to more than ten meters. It was as if something was dragging her down.

With panic creeping into her voice, Joan asked, "What... what should I do? Camilla, what should I do?"

"Move faster... don't stop. Kick harder! You can do it!" Camilla shouted hysterically.

However, Joan was sinking even faster. No matter how hard Joan moved her tail, she was sinking rapidly as though she was being sucked into a swamp. Now not only her tail was effected but her torso and hands started to elongate.

Upon realizing what was happening, Joan stretched out her hands in despair and cried, "Help me..."

"No!"

Before Camilla could finish, she passed out.

Camilla opened her eyes. Sweat started to drip from the tip of her nose and fell onto the back of her hand as she braced herself on the floor. Only then did she notice that she was covered with a fine sheen of cold sweat.

"What happened? Is Joan in danger?" Thunder asked as he helped her to her feet.

It took Camilla a long time to come out of her trance. She muttered blankly, "I don't know. The channeling... was disrupted."

# Chapter 1136: Sea and Sky

---

It was a split second that contained an eternity.

Joan saw her body lengthen in the pitch-black ocean indefinitely until a white speck of light slid into her view. Then the white fleck burst into a haze of blazing white light that blinded her. The next moment, the memory that her body had been stretched beyond the human limit gradually came back, and she heard a deafening roar of water. The sound shattered the tranquility of the deep sea.

She felt she was spinning in a whirl, but soon denied this thought. A whirl only spinned around its center, but the water torrents here constantly crashed into each other, which was why they produced such earsplitting sounds.

Even Joan, as a mermaid girl, found it hard to keep her balance. Everything was out of control. She was flushed down by the thunderous water torrents like a feather on a stormy sea.

"Where am I?" she thought.

Although she had no idea what this place was, she was positive that this was not the depth of the ocean, as she could not feel huge water pressure weigh upon her scales. She gathered that the water was no more than 100 meters deep, which meant she could soon reach the surface of the water. Nevertheless, no matter how hard she tried to reconnect Camilla, there was no response from the other end.

This urged upon her to swim up and get herself out of danger.

Fortunately, swimming was much easier than changing directions.

She strained to raise her head and rose slowly against the rush of water. When she rose out of the water, her eyes huge in bewilderment.

The Shadow Islands seemed to have vanished in the thin air.

She could only spy rocks around and above her.

The vast sea had transformed into a narrow "stream" that stretched a few hundred meters. The tumultuous seawater ran wildly, her eyes screwing up against the equally wild wind. The wuthering wind and the wind she had heard earlier down the bottom of the sea vied with each other.

Joan turned around, blinded by the light behind. The water currents were now rushing to that light source.

"Am I... going to be flushed down again?"

Before she could stop it, she had been pushed into the haze by the resounding currents.

Then the surrounding became quiet instantly. Everything seemed to be far away from her. For a moment, Joan felt she was flying, her body so light she could not feel it. The next moment, it suddenly dawned on her that she was indeed floating in midair!

There was the blue sea underneath, 1,000 meters apart! She was no longer surrounded by those rocks but actually in the sky. The light she had seen was the sunlight peeping through clouds. The seawater gushing from the cave had now become a large waterfall.

"But... I'm not Maggie or Lightning. I can't fly!" Joan thought.

The next moment, she started to plummet.

"Ya — Ya — Ya — "

**SPLASH!**

After a frightening long drop, Joan plunged into the water.

She would have probably been scared to death had she not watched a similar scene in the magic movie. When she came out of the water again, she heaved a deep sigh of relief.

"Why did I end up floating in the sky? I had been deep down the ocean a moment ago!" Joan wondered.

At this thought, Joan stared up and was frozen on the spot.

"God almighty, what is it?"

She could not believe her eyes.

A huge rock was suspending in the air, so large that she could only see the side facing her. It cast an enormous shadow on the sea as dark clouds overcast the sky. A few white puffs of clouds scudded across the rock, giving her the impression that she was looking at the crest of a towering mountain rather than a gigantic rock.

Nevertheless, this "mountain" seemed to be more magnificent than the Impassable Mountain Range. Joan judged that the rock must be 100 meters thick.

On the humongous rock were many cracks, the shortest stretching a few hundred meters and the longest a few kilometers. Seawater gushed out of those cracks, forming a huge waterfall connecting the sea and the sky. As the water converged, the ocean waves foamed and splattered.

Joan believed even Thunder had never seen such amazing scenery.

Although she did not know where she was, she was sure that this place was very far away from the Fjords and the Graycastle. Otherwise, people would have noticed such a huge rock in the sky.

"Can I... still go back?"

Joan returned to the water, a few bubbles coming out of her mouth.

SPLASH!

Just then, she heard another splash, as though something else had fallen into the sea.

"Is there someone else like me?"

After doing a quick calculation of the distance between that



fallen object and herself, Joan dived into the water and swam in the direction of that splashing sound.

She swam for around seven minutes until she saw what had fallen into the water. It was a strange boat, as large as the three-masted ship she had seen, its lower part a combination of a fish and a squid. The upper part of the boat was a ribcage, which housed a pulp of inner organs. The entire boat looked like a dead body of a half-eaten animal that made Joan felt a jolt of nausea.

However, the monster was not dead. After it fell into the water, it started to swim in the direction of the ocean waves with its four fins. Joan's eyes followed it, and then she was astonished at what she saw!

A little way farther on, a fleet of similar monsters lined up in the ocean, sliding in and out of her sight as the water rose and fell.

After the monster that had just fallen into the water joined them, the fleet marched slowly toward the east and disappeared from her view. Joan was relieved.

She wondered what she should do next. Since the boat-shaped monster had fallen from the sky, there might be some other grisly enemy.

Although she had never seen such monsters before, Joan did not think a good idea to approach them. Ever since she had become a witch, her instinct had never lied to her.

"Don't force yourself. Your friends are waiting for you."

Camilla's words came floating out of her memories.

Then she thought of the smiling faces of Lightning, Maggie and Lorgar.

She wanted to go back.

She had never had such a strong desire in her entire life. She yearned to return to Neverwinter, the place where she had only

lived for a winter but had made many friends.

She was longing to meet everybody again!

"Ya!" Joan shouted self-encouragingly and swam to the west after she figured out where she should go.

No matter how vast the ocean was, it had a boundary.

Also, Lightning had told her once that the earth was a sphere. As long as she swam on, she would see her friends from the Exploration Group again!

She was certain about it!

...

"We have to go," Thunder said as he looked at Camilla Dary who was stooping over the railing. "Our destination isn't the Shadow Islands. We're wasting our supplies. It has been three days. I don't think I can force the fleet to continue to stay here any longer."

"But..." Camilla said apprehensively, "Joan's not back yet."

"This isn't your fault," Thunder said as he patted Camilla on the shoulder. "Waiting for her here won't make things any better. Do you remember what you said earlier? There are two reasons for the disconnection. One is that the connected individual is dead, and the other is that you guys are two far apart. If you insist it was the second scenario, we have a greater reason not to linger on."

"Are you saying... that we should look for her to the east of the Sealine?"

"To be completely honest, the chance that we find her there is slim, but it's better than waiting here doing nothing," Thunder said good-naturedly. "Remember that Joan is special. A sailor will definitely die if he's drowned in water, but Joan won't. She has lived undersea for more than a decade, so she could survive without us."

"I... I see," Camilla said while biting her lip. "Then I'll come with

you, to the 'Sealine'."

"No," Thunder interrupted her. "I can't let you continue with our adventure under this condition. I promised to King Roland. No matter what happens, I'm obligated to bring you back to Neverwinter after the exploration of the Shadow Islands. They need you to fight the demons. Plus, only His Majesty knows what had possibly happened to Joan at the bottom of the sea. Your information is crucial," he paused for a few seconds and then said solemnly, "We all have our own responsibilities, and all of us need to fulfill our duties. That's what we should do."

Camilla closed her eyes, sad and agonized.

Two hours later, the "Snow Wind" whistled. The fleet set their sails and headed toward the far east. One of the ships left the fleet and headed in the direction it was coming.

The two parties parted and soon, neither of them could see each other as the other gradually disappeared in their views.

# Chapter 1137: The Banished Senior Demon

---

At the front near Tower Station No. 9 at the Fertile Plains.

"The target is 6' 4" in the northeast, at 6,500 miles. We request for artillery fire."

Sylvie lied on her stomach on Maggie's back, looking down at the vast land below. The ground had been excavated around two or three days ago. The air was saturated with the fresh smell of soil.

"Copy," Shavy answered curtly over the Sigil of Listening. "Fire in five minutes." She then added, "Please be careful."

Sylvie looked in the direction of Taquila. From where she stood, she could spy the ruin of the Holy City. Although it was more than 50 kilometers away from her and was no bigger than a finger nail from this distance, she somehow felt it was within her reach. Sihouletting against the forest, the ruined city looked like a miniscule sculpture long forgotten.

While the ruin was beyond the vision of the Eye of Magic, Sylvie could still sense the glimmers of that bright red fleck. As long as the red speck remained stationary, they were safe.

"Alright, got it."

Sylvie slid the Sigil carefully into her pocket, patted Maggie's broad back and said, "Climb a little bit higher."

"Awh!"

Maggie, who had now transformed into a Devilbeast, produced a long howl, her giant wings sprouting from her shoulder blades and flapping against the wind. She was now even larger than two normal Devilbeasts put together, even larger than the mutated Devilbeast ridden by Kabradhabi. Nevertheless, Maggie was overall colossal even when she was in the form of a pigeon.

After they rose around 100 meters, they heard distant roars crack

through the air.

Then several earth pillars rose from the ground at the front, which immediately rippled and sent grass flying in the sky. Shockwaves rocked the ground. Such a powerful explosion was always delightful to behold.

It was not long before a second and a third rounds of explosion took place.

The Artillery Battalion was now able to direct their shells accurately to their designated spots. Since it was difficult to calculate the exact targetted area, Sylvie simply did a rough estimate. The area was around 16,400 square meters, almost as large as the Castle District in Neverwinter, which was the district she was most familiar with.

As the Artillery Battalion continued to fire, Sylvie soon saw broken limbs exhaled from the cloud of dust.

A 152-caliber grenade would create a one-meter deep hole in the ground, whereas the demons could go no deeper than 50 centimeters underground even when the earth was permeated with the Red Mist. For the land uncorrupted by the Red Mist, the demons could hide underneath the ground but just barely. If a shell landed right on their heads, they would literally be blasted into smithereens.

Further, not only the grenade itself could kill a demon but the aftermath shockwaves could do so as well. As the demons were edging closely to the surface of the ground, any shockwaves within a radius of 20 meters would be fatal to the demons.

His Majesty called this type of random attack "sweep".

After five rounds of fierce bombardment, around 100 demons crept out from underground and started to retreat.

"The enemy has come out. They're all Mad Demons. Please fire at the same shooting angle," Sylvie instructed.

"Got it."

Suddenly, as if sensing something, Sylvie looked toward Taquila and saw the red fleck flash and streak toward their encampment.

Sylvie immediately took out another Sigil of Listening and said, "Lightning, come back, now! The Magic Slayer is coming!"

Maggie instantly turned about and retreated.

About seven minutes later, Maggie, Lightning and Sylvie all returned to the air defense zone. In the meantime, the Magic Slayer had also slid into their views. Sylvie saw the blue-skinned, human-like demon hover above the artillery encampment while staring at the three of them, his eyes gleaming maliciously.

The Artillery Battalion below was still firing.

The Magic Slayer was apparently furious but he could not do anything to protect his kind from the rain of shells.

At last, he headed back where he was coming, leaving the fleeing Mad Demons behind.

Sylvie was instantly relieved.

"He's gone. Let's fly around!" Maggie exclaimed in excitement.

However, at the sight of a nervous Lightning who balled her hand into a fist, Maggie quickly changed her mind. "Let's call it a day. I have to save some magic power for the night patrol. I've inspected the area within a radius of five to six miles and I'm pretty sure that the construction team is safe for now."

...

After returning to the underground headquarters, Sylvie marked the bombarded area green.

There were many green areas like that along the railway.

"Good job," Morning Light said as he held a cup of black tea. "It seems that Lady Edith's banishment plan has worked."

Sylvie took the tea and said smilingly, "Yes, it looks like so."

This was actually not the first time they had repulsed the demons.

The scouting had indeed become increasingly dangerous when they were 100 miles away from Taquila, because from that point, Sylvie had to pay more attention to the movements on the ground instead of the sky. However, the demons, with the help of their gas tanks, could suspend in midair as long as they preferred within this range.

Given such circumstances, the General Staff developed a "banishment plan", which divided the scouting area into several sections. The area within two kilometers were marked as the safety zone. In this zone, the Magic Eye could see through and keep an eye on everything, so chances of them suffering a raid were pretty slim. The air force could leave the trenches in this area and provide broader protection.

The area within ten miles was called the recognition zone, which was the farthest the Longsong Cannons could reach and was also where Sylvie and Maggie mainly conducted their activities. This area would be marked green and considered as safe once a "sweep" was completed.

The area beyond 10 miles but within 50 miles was the dangerous zone monitored solely by Lightning. The purpose of setting up this zone was to warn the soldiers of the enemy hidden in clouds and earn more time for Maggie and Sylvie to retreat. Only Lightning had the capability to shake off her pursuers. Not even the Magic Slayer could possibly keep up with Lightning who flew at the speed of sound.

It appeared that the "banishment plan" worked pretty well. They had, at the moment, totally controlled the pace of the battle, leaving the demons no opportunities to fight back. Without the support of Mad Demons from the ground, the Devilbeasts in the

sky found it hard to effectively stop the armored trains.

The main purpose of this "banishment plan" was to transform the recognition zone gradually into a safety zone by slowly removing the demons' outposts while keeping the Magic Slayer away from the battlement, so that he could do nothing about the scouting team. If they could successfully provoke him into breaking through the defensive line, that would be even better.

Nonetheless, the Magic Slayer had still not lost himself yet.

"By the way," Sylvie said as she surveyed the room, "where's Miss Pearl of the Northern Region?"

"She went back to Neverwinter by the 'Seagull' with Iron Axe after receiving His Majesty's order," Ferlin replied with a smile. "I think that's pretty much the time."

To discuss the strategies and tactics for the final battle!



# Chapter 1138: Interception

---

In Neverwinter, Graycastle.

Roland received Iron Axe, the Commander-in-Chief of the First Army, and Edith Kant, the Chief of General Staff.

"How did it go? Do you like riding on the 'Seagull'?" Roland asked as he looked at the pair with some interest.

"Your, your Majesty, it's fast, but it's... a little too fast for me," Iron Axe answered with a look of terror. "I didn't feel that way before. However, when I actually sat in there, I noticed that it wobbled pretty badly. I was very scared when the craft went up and down and thought I was going to fall." He then administered a military salute and exclaimed through his teeth, "Of course, I promise that I'll do my best to overcome my fear, Your Majesty!"

It appeared that this seasoned Mojin warrior feared heights. Roland asked, his brows raised, "So, how are you going to overcome the fear?"

"I'll watch more magic movies once this war is over until I'm no longer afraid of it!"

"That's really like what a Sand National would say," Roland thought in amusement, a muscle flinching in his face. He turned to Edith and asked, "What about you?"

The Pearl of the Northern Region moistened her lips and answered quietly after a moment of silence, "Fantastic."

"That's it?"

Roland waited for Edith to elaborate but the latter did not say anything further. Then he noticed a rosy flush fluttered over her cheeks, her eyes glistening.

Roland heaved a sigh. He had to admit that his subordinates all had some unusual personalities. He expected to see them heap

praises on his new invention, impressed and shocked. Now it appeared he had overestimated the psychological impact of the aircraft.

Roland rose to his feet and said, "Since you're already here, let's start the meeting. We have to get prepared for the final battle."

...

After six months of construction work, the first main railway was only 60 kilometers away from the Taquila ruin. Once the construction of Tower Station No. 10 was completed, the First Army would be able to directly attack the demons at Taquila. The "Torch" plan had cost much greater manpower and supplies than any of the military operations they had carried out in the past four years. 80% of the iron produced by the Furnace Area were used to build the railway. The sole purpose for this plan was to stop the demons from erecting the Obelisk before the arrival of the Bloody Moon.

Once the Fertile Plains was enveloped by the Red Mist, the demons would be able to invade the interior from the Impassable Mountain Range anytime. By then, not only would the First Army face a bitter battle but the demons would no longer be bounded by distance. Roland definitely did not want to see the battle unfold in this way, considering that human beings were already outnumbered by the demons.

However, if they managed to seize Taquila before the final battle, the demons would have to erect their Obelisk in the other two Holy Cities, the Starfall City and Arrieta. Both two cities were more on the northern end of the plain. Even if the demons built their outposts there, they could not directly threaten the Four Kingdoms. In that case, they would not only have a bigger chance to win the Battle of Divine Will but would also earn another 400 years for human beings to convalesce.

As Graycastle had already entered an Age of Industrialization,

Roland was positive that human beings would have much greater achievement in the next 400 years when the survival of the mankind no longer depended on food and basic life necessities. Therefore, the vast plain, in a sense, became their strategic buffing zone as well as their prospective territory for further development.

Men would eventually defeat demons.

Though perhaps this generation might not witness their eventual victory.

This was also why Roland did not explain the reason for this plan in detail.

Unfortunately, the plan did not go as well as he had anticipated. They had planned to exterminate all the demons at Taquila and convert the ruin into their own stronghold. However, the First Army was now only one step away from success.

The appearance of the Magic Slayer had forced them to adjust their initial plan. The power of the curse inflicted by the Magic Slayer appeared to be incurable. Even very minor wounds could lead to mortality. Lightning could more or less cure herself, but Leaf's condition was much worse.

Based on Ashes' report, Leaf's health was deteriorating.

Although Leaf did not say anything about her injuries, Ashes could still tell that her health was declining. This indicated that the deterioration of her wound was beyond her self-repairing ability. Like a lesion, the infected area gradually expanded and would finally kill the patient. No matter how long this process might take, Roland could not let Leaf die. He could not accept any loss of the population.

It was time to make a final settlement with the Magic Slayer and Taquila.

The representatives of the witches and the army all gathered in the meeting room to discuss the upcoming battle. A screen spread

across the wall and presented the image of the Third Border City. Their sole topic of discussion was how to kill the Magic Slayer that could inflict fatal curses on people.

Edith broke the silence as usual. "First of all, from what the General Staff can tell, when the Magic Slayer see a defeat is inevitable, he would very likely retreat. This is just an assumption. We haven't had much solid evidence to support this theory yet. Judging from the fact that he's still keeping a distance from the encampment, we believe he's exactly the opposite of Kabradhabi."

"I agree," Alethea, who had fought the demons more than anyone else, said. "Gallantry doesn't necessarily mean you have to be a suicidal moron. We agree with the demons on this term. A senior commander plays a far more important role than a Mad Demon. It isn't likely that he would die meaninglessly like his subordinates."

"So, we must be proactive and intercept them when they retreat," Edith continued while nodding. "Fortunately, we know everything about our enemy and have experience in dealing with them." She then cast a look at Andrea Quinn and said, "If the Magic Slayer doesn't notice our plan, a long-distance shot would definitely be the safest and most effective way to kill him."

Andrea brushed her hair away from her face gracefully.

"I have a question," Tilly spoke.

"Please go ahead, Your Highness," the Pearl of the Northern Region said while placing her hand on her chest.

"First of all, we can't guarantee that one bullet would be enough to kill the Magic Slayer. What if he's still alive after the bullet hits him? We won't have a second chance. Second, what if the Magic Slayer has noticed the presence of this weapon with a long shooting range and attempts to avoid a direct confrontation? From our past experience, it's very likely that he'll do so. It seems to me that the enemy learns firearms faster than we desire him to."

"I've thought about these two possibilities," Edith replied. "For the first one, the General Staff has decided to use a God's Stone of Retaliation as the bullet."

"A God's Stone bullet?"

"Correct. Even if we can't kill the Magic Slayer at one shot, we can immobilize him. Of course, the smaller a God's stone is, the softer it will be. A God's stone as small as a bullet can be easily crushed by a hammer, so it'll break before we fire. However, we can probably try Miss Andrea's weapon, as her weapon has a much larger caliber," Edith paused for a second and then went on, "Regarding this point, I've confirmed with Ms. Agatha. A God's Stone made from magic blood will be a lot harder. We can first test that out using the two bottles of magic blood she collected from the demons."

"To use the demons' blood to kill them? I like it," Alethea said smilingly. "You're the second mortal I'm impressed with."

The Pearl of the Northern Region returned her a smile indifferently and said, "As for your second question, I'll need a preserve unit."

"Only Lightning is faster than the Magic Slayer," Wendy answered apprehensively. "However, she can't... stop him."

"No," Edith said while shaking her head. "There's something faster than the Magic Slayer —"

"Something?" Tilly echoed with a look of comprehension.

"Right. That is — a diving 'Seagull'," Edith said slowly.

# Chapter 1139: Celine's Request

---

"To have a God's Punishment Witch sit on the plane?"

"Exactly. The anti-magic area works the same way as a God's Stone. A dozen God's Punishment Witches should be able to kill the Magic Slayer. Even if they couldn't, our sniper team will give him one last blow," the Pearl of the Northern Region stated flatly. "Of course, this isn't going to be easy. Our plan really depends on how the other party will react. Nevertheless, we do have some ways to tackle him. Personally, I think this plan will work. Our enemy has seen bullets and guns but not the 'Seagull'. They won't believe a man can actually fly in the sky."

Roland instantly undertood the General Staff's intention.

They could never rely on the sniper team entirely. If the Magic Slayer noticed that the patrolling Devilbeasts mysteriously disappeared and thereby found out this long-range weapon, he would naturally develop corresponding countermeasures. The Magic Slayer would probably swerve in the air or hurtle really low above the ground. In that case, even Andrea could not anything about him.

Andrea's ability was to find out the enemy. However, the enemy might not necessarily show up on the battlefield.

Under such circumstances, someone else must entice the enemy out of hiding.

The one who provoked the Magic Slayer must be equally fast and powerful, but there was no such person among the witches.

Therefore, the General Staff thought of combining the glider and the God's Punishment Witches, which Roland had to admit was a really clever strategy.

The "Seagull" could bid her time in clouds before diving to the ground. After she accumulated a certain amount of kinetic

energies, the 'Seagull' could travel over 500 miles an hour and catch up with the Magic Slayer sprinting on the ground.

Yet...

"This is the best plan we can think of at the moment, but I don't think Ashes will agree. This is too dangerous. You may run directly into the Magic Slayer," Roland broke off and stared at Tilly. "So..."

"I'll let her recede," Tilly said resolutely after a moment of silence. "I want to do this."

"Your Highness!" Wendy yelled exasperatedly.

Roland dimly knew what the superintendent of the Witch Union was thinking. The very two figures that tied all the witches together are Anna and Tilly. The former was the queen and the latter the legal royal heir to the throne. Wendy did not want to see either of them put themselves in a dangerous position.

"This mission isn't any different from the transportation of witches that we normally do. By the time the Magic Slayer notices the 'Seagull', the other Taquila witches would have rounded on him. Therefore, everything will be under control," Tilly said with a smile. "Don't worry, Ashes and I know what we're doing. We won't do anything beyond our capabilities."

Knowing that Tilly was determined, Roland did not want to further discuss the matter. He turned to Edith and said, "Go on."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Edith replied as she walked to the map. "The last step of this plan is to launch an ambush. The Senior Demons could not hold up for very long without the Red Mist, so they would have to retreat to recharge. This means that the best location for an ambush is somewhere close to their Red Mist supply line."

"Regarding that, I have a suggestion," Alethea cut in suddenly. "I'm not sure if you still remember the infiltration mission carried out by that Extraordinary the other day."

"Oh... that silly girl," Tilly said as she mopped her forehead. "She wasted one precious Five-Colored Stone because of that operation."

"But now, we'll have an excellent view at that location at the rear of the Taquila ruin," Alethea said, her main tentacle high up in the air. "Once we turn on the phantom instrument, we'll be able to see everything about their Red Mist supply line!"

Roland remembered that after the wolf girl, Lorgar, had discovered the demons in the vicinity of the ruin, the Witch Union had gone to scout around that area at once. As they had deviated from their original course, the mission had failed. If they had broken the Five-Colored Stone right in front of Taquila, they would have known every single movement of the demons and thus avoided the subsequent raid at Tower Station No. 1.

However, this failure could now, quite contrarily, help them.

Somehow he thought of one old saying.

"You never know whether this is a premonition or a blessing in disguise."

"Well, in that case, Iron Axe and Edith will stay at the Third Border City to draft a detailed ambush operation plan," Roland said. "As for the God's Stone bullet, Agatha, please work with the Ministry of Engineering."

"As you wish, Your Majesty!" everyone replied together.

When the meeting was over, Alethea suddenly whispered to Roland.

"Celine hopes that you could come to the underground lab. We've got a breakthrough in the research on the Magic Ceremony Cube."

...

Half an hour later, Roland showed up in the underground lab.

Celine turned on the Magic Cube and instantly, a familiar red light appeared in front of him.



"The breakthrough you talked about..."

"Please look at this," Celine said as she handed two small stones the size of a thumb nail with her auxiliary tentacles. "They're both the cube parts and are pretty old."

"They do look old," Roland said as he stroked his chin thoughtfully. There were noticeable signs of abrasion at one end closer to the outer surface of the cube. "Have you successfully disassembled the Magic Cube already? No, hold on, you have the parts. Then how come it can still illuminate? Is it because..."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Celine said smilingly. "I installed my replicates on the Magic Cube. The cube works perfectly fine, which indicate that those replicates work as well. What do you think of it?"

"Ingenious..." Roland remarked as he held Celine's tentacles excitedly as if he was appreciating some delicate instruments. "It only took you three months. I thought that would take you at least a year!"

"Slimwrist from the Sleeping Spell helped me a lot, and the structure of the Magic Cube is much simpler than that of the magic core," Celine answered, a little embarrassed under Roland's feverish gaze, and disengaged herself. "I withdraw my words that we need thousands of stones. I believe we only need 500 to make a cube replicate."

"The garrison at the Festive Harbor is now taking actions under my order. I believe we'll soon hear something from them," Roland said cheerfully. If the replicates works, this new device might, like the steam engine, bring about drastic changes to Neverwinter.

"Well, if that's the case, can I ask you for something in return?" Celine suddenly changed the subject hopefully. "Of course, this is all for our future research."

"What do you want then?" Roland asked curiously.

"An assistant, an assistant who could help me better understand the knowledge in the Dream World," Celine answered as she swayed her main tentacle. "My fellow witches would be most suitable for this position. However, they feel it hard to learn on their own. They told me there are institutions where an instructor can help students and answer their questions. I think that would be much easier for them. So, Your Majesty, could you send them to school?"

# Chapter 1140: Dream World's "Illegal Immigrants"

---

After nightfall, Roland told Anna about what had happened in the meeting.

"... We still need to adjust the stability and strength of the God's Stone bullet so that we could suit its power to practical applications. I think you would be the only person who could do this. Make this project your top priority for now. I'll ask Andrea and Agatha to assist you."

"I feel like my work never ends," Anna said as she rested her beautiful head on Roland's shoulder. "I have to make the machine tool that is used to process plane parts, improve the internal combustion engine, and work on the railway at the front, as well as many projects on the book... I envy Pasha and Celine. Although Blackfire helps me a lot, it isn't as flexible as tentacles. I can't work on so many things simultaneously."

"Oh, I don't think it's a good idea. I don't want to cuddle a giant blob. You're not only the Minister of Engineering but also the queen of Graycastle. You're a public figure," Roland said smilingly. He knew Anna was simply sharing her happiness rather than complaining. Ever since she had assumed the office of the Minister of Engineering, she no longer looked sulky and expressionless. The more she worked, the more cheerful she became. Roland said, "Of course, I'm also looking for someone to help you. If everything goes well, there will soon be more people in the Ministry of Engineering."

Roland gathered that Rex from the Society of Wondrous Crafts should now be at the Fjords, though he was not sure if the latter had noticed the significance of his reward, A Comprehensive Study of the Law of Buoyancy. The marine craft he had drawn at the end of the book was based on the description in Twenty Thousand

Leagues Under the Sea. For a quasi-inventer like Rex, who had never read any science fiction, such a magnificent envisage of a future submarine would definitely fascinate him.

"Really?" Anna said as she stretched herself and wrapped her arms around Roland's waist. "I'll wait for that day to come then, but now... I want something else as a reward."

Roland smiled. It appeared more than one person needed a reward today. He then unconsciously raised his hand to Anna's back.

...

Roland closed his eyes after Anna fell asleep.

When he woke up the next morning, the ceiling of his apartment in the Dreamworld slid into his sight. A beam of sunlight slanted across the floor through the curtain.

Roland brushed his teeth, had breakfast, and then saw Zero off as usual. He leaned over the banister and peered down at the sea of heads down in the alley below. Students were hurrying to school with their backpacks; young professionals were scurrying to work; some old men were working out in the chill of the morning. Everything seemed to be chaotic but energetic.

Nothing had changed in this city, but Roland knew this world was gradually transforming in a subtle and imperceptible way, as though this Dreamland had its own consciousness.

The evidence of such a transformation was the memories that had never previously existed, the battered and frayed red book, and the note in it.

After he read the book *Raison d'être*, Roland started to look for the Rose Café. However, nothing came up on the internet, and the witches could not find such a place either. There were 46 coffee shops in the city, but none of them was called Rose Café.

There was a possibility that this was just one of the author's bad

jokes. However, as Roland learned more about this world, he was more convinced that the note was suggesting something to him.

The foreign race that had completely disappeared without leaving a trace.

The constant wars.

The inexorable awakenings and erosions.

All of these signs seemed to be mirroring the real world. This especially holds true with the discovery of the radiation people and tablet men on the battlefield, which made the narratives in the book even more compelling.

The question that puzzled him the most was why the book in the Dream World would, in a way, reflect the real world and also use the word "Battle of Divine Will". Garcia told him that, unfortunately, the author of the book had not left any hints. The only clue available was the note.

Roland had to put these questions aside as he searched for the Rose Café.

At around 8:00, he heard three rhythmic knocks on the living room door. They were one loud and two gentle knocks that indicated that nobody was in the hallway.

Roland immediately opened the door and let the visitors in.

"Good morning, Your Majesty," three petite witches saluted. One of them was Dawnen, the first witch who had entered the "Veil of Invisibility" in the Dream World.

"They do look like... high school students," thought Roland as he clapped his hand to his forehead. Dawnen's ability was erasing the traces of her companions. She had joined the Blessed Army the second year after her awakening and transferred her soul at the age of 28. She had extensive war experience. Her favorite weapons were a short sword and dagger. As witches usually aged much more slowly than common people, Dawnen looked extremely

young in her dainty frame. To Roland, she looked no older than a teen.

So did the other two witches.

Roland now remembered his conversation with Celine.

"Go to school? I remember the God's Punishment Witches were all in their 20s on average. They should have been college students, but they only have an education level of middle or high school. If they look significantly older than other students, people will be suspicious."

"That won't be a problem. Many of us look younger than they actually are."

Celine was not exaggerating. The other two witches looked even younger than Dawnen.

Roland had to admit that after he asked Phyllis and Faldi to take care of the God's Punishment Witches, he spent most of his time collecting and memorizing information. After all, it would be too much for him to show 300 witches around in the Dream World while studying and investigating at the same time.

Roland was very impressed and pleased with his self-discipline.

"My name is Saint Miran. My ability is imitation. I can impersonate anyone who is connected to me. This is my second time visiting the Dream World. Nice to meet you."

"My name is Dido. My ability is the invisible pocket. In short, I can put objects into a magic, invisible bag. Well... it's not a very useful ability, but I'll do my best for Ms. Celine, on the honor of the Quest Society!"

The two witches introduced themselves.

Judging from their abilities, neither of them were combat witches. Since they could not join the Blessed Army, they had developed expertises in some other areas. Abilities shaped

personalities. This theory had been well verified by the notorious poker trio.

Roland gathered that Dawnen was here to protect Saint Miran and Dido. The Dream World was not always safe after all. Particularly when there was an increasing number of Fallen Evils at the moment.

Roland nodded and looked at the three witches. He said, "Celine has told you the mission. Watch for my signals before answering questions. Don't talk too much."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

The next problem was how to successfully send these "illegal immigrants" to school.

In fact, Roland had been thinking about how to hide the Taquila witches. So as to not expose them to the public, Roland had always chosen to fight Fallen Evils at night.

The warehouse which they paid frequent visits to would have raised suspicions among the residents a long time ago had the witches not used their abilities to erase their trace.

After thinking for a while, Roland could think of no one who could help him except Garcia.

He thus picked up the telephone and dialed her number.

# Chapter 1141: Trust and Misunderstanding

---

"Hey, just about the right time. I want to discuss something with you." Garcia's voice came from the other end of the line before Roland spoke.

"Um... what do you want to talk about?"

"I would rather talk to you in person. Come to my room. You just got up, didn't you?"

Garcia demanded condescendingly over the phone, as though sleeping in was a capital offence for martialists.

"Well... alright then," Roland said thoughtfully, quickly making up his mind to first see what she would say. If Garcia happened to be in a bad mood, he could always call on her another day.

After hanging up the telephone, Roland asked the three witches to wait for him at the living room before he strode off to Room 0827.

"The door is open. Come in," Garcia said gruffly as she heard Roland's footsteps.

Roland entered and found Garcia in her summer dress, standing in front of her fridge with two glasses in her hands. Her gray hair streamed down to her shoulders, tiny beads of sweat on the tip of her nose. She was wearing a flip-flop patterned with cartoon characters. Instead of a self-disciplined martialist, she looked more like a common college student enjoying the summer. Garcia asked, "Any drinks? Water, tea or coke? They're all iced."

Garcia was actually just two to three years older than him. Had Roland not posed himself as a wretched landlord who used to be a dropout and sacked bartender, he would have been still in school.

"Coke," Roland replied distractedly. "Did you just come back from your morning training?"



"Unlike you, I don't have unlimited leisure time."

Roland did not know how to retort. They had been more open to each other lately. However, Garcia seemed to have developed a nasty habit of constant criticism, and what was worse, she appeared to be quite enjoying it. It was a miracle that she was still alive, fully intact.

Yet Roland could tell, after knowing her for such a long time, that she was in good humor. Indeed, she was quite delighted.

Was it because of the matter she was going to share?

"Here, iced green tea," Garcia said as she put down a drink in front of him.

"I said coke..." Roland protested mildly, his brows raised.

"You didn't do your morning exercise, so it would be better to reduce your sugar intake," Garcia answered seriously to stifle her smile. "The evolution of the Force of Nature has nothing to do with one's body type. A skinny person could also have great power, which means your power won't help you tone your body. If you plan to take part in a martialist contest, you'd better make sure you work out regularly. A fit martialist is always going to be more popular than an overweight one."

"Then why did you bother offering me choices," Roland snapped within himself while rolling his eyes. He said grumpily, "So what? Did you ask me to come here just to educate me on fitness? I've told you that I have the slightest interest in becoming a top martialist or participating in some sort of contest. I don't need fame to hunt down the evil and protect the world. I would rather be what I am now, a nameless, unknown martialist who fights anonymously for the mankind."

If he did become a public figure, how could he continue to search for the Fallen Evils?

"Incredible..." Garcia muttered, her eyes fixed upon Roland as she

continued slowly, "I thought you would never say something like that. My master once told me that you should never believe what a person says but what he does. If I didn't see what you've done, I would have thought you were just a hypocrite who lies unblushingly. But as much as I hate to admit it, you're... honest."

Roland knew what Garcia was referring to.

After he successfully killed his first Fallen Evil, he and the Taquila witches started to work together to exterminate other Fallen Evils in the city.

Faldi searched the city in daytime, and he and the combat witches went to kill at night. Apart from obtaining mutated Forces of Nature, they would also get a lot of extra income often. To avoid uninvited attention, Roland would only take some cash or unidentifiable personal articles. Sometimes, he would donate some Forces of Nature to the Martialist Association as well.

The Martialist Association monitored all the Fallen Evils in the city. If they discovered a large number of Fallen Evils mysteriously died and their Forces of Nature disappeared, they would very likely become suspicious. As such, Roland had to voluntarily report some of the incidents every now and then to keep his identity and his miraculous work secret.

Meanwhile, Roland was also proactively defending against erosions. According to Garcia, he was currently the most active new member in the association, and he had even killed more Fallen Evils than some official members. The Fallen Evils, on the other hand, had also realized that they had a powerful enemy and were now strenuously tracking him down.

In other words, Roland had made quite a buzz among the executives of the Prism City and the Fallen Evils. Nevertheless, he was still a nobody among fellow martialists and the public. Garcia knew all that Roland had done simply because Roland needed to contact her to hand in Forces of Nature.

"Hmph... that's my duty," Roland said while clearing his throat. "Isn't it the responsibility of a martialist?"

"Yes," Garcia, to Roland's surprise, smiled, "this is the responsibility of an martialist." She handed him a piece of paper and said, "Congratulations, you're now an official member of the Martialist Association. This is your contract that has just arrived. Effective upon execution."

"I remember you only need to solve one erosion to become an official member, and I've already solved eight or ten now. That's really slow of the Prism City administration."

"Because... the Martialist Association is an interational organization."

"So I'm an official member just as you are now?"

"No," Garcia said while shaking her head and passed a brochure across the table. "Actually, you've outperformed me."

Roland opened the brochure curiously and was mildly surprised. "This is — "

"The hunting license," Garcia replied slowly, her smile fading away. "Only outstanding and dedicated martialists would be granted the license. There are no more than ten licensed martialists in this city, and the Prism City has issued no more than 100 licenses. Your rights as a licensed martialist and the matters that you need to pay particular attention to are all listed at the end of the booklet. Remember, the license not only represents the trust the Association puts in you but also a greater responsibility. I hope you could carry on and help the mankind gain the eventual victory."

"So this is what she's glad about..."

Normally, people would feel upset, jealous and frustrated when being outstripped by a new member recruited by themselves. However, Roland did not see any of these negative emotions in

Garcia. She was truly happy for him, as though she was also honored.

This made Roland a little unsettled.

He knew that Garcia spoke most highly of him at the moment. Because of her high expectation, Roland now felt a surge of heavy guilt. He knew that despite her haughtiness, Garcia was a person of morality and principles. The best example was how she had helped the residents in the modular apartment stand up to the evacuation threat of the Clover Group. Thinking of the potential misunderstanding that might stand between them in the future, Roland was very troubled.

"By the way, why did you call me?" Garcia asked while sipping her tea lazily. "I've done my part. I don't think you anticipated all that, did you?"

"Er... I need your help with something." Roland had no choice but said, "Can you come to my room?"

Garcia cast him a suspicious look and said, "Sure, but is it not something that you can say here?"

"You'll know when you come over."

"OK."

Roland took a deep breath and led her to Room 0825.

As soon as they stepped into the living room, the three witches turned around, their eyes sparkling with excitement.

Then Roland felt a chill running down his spine.

"You... you finally did this!" Garcia gasped, standing rooted to the spot. "My goodness... they're still kids. I, I'm going to call the police!"

## Chapter 1142: Different Roads Lead to the Same Castle

---

Roland was surprised that Garcia's first instinct was to call the police rather than report to the Martialist Association. Although the Martialist Association was a separate organization that was independent from judicial institutions, they required their members to adhere to a strict moral code and therefore, punishments to a corrupted martialist would be more severe than that imposed by law. It seemed that Garcia was particularly lenient with him.

Roland twitched his lips and felt an urgent need to clarify this matter. He had not done anything wrong, so neither the police nor the Association should be involved.

Anyway, he had to first calm Garcia down.

"Call the police?" Roland echoed in a falsely surprised tone. "Why?"

"You ask me?" Garcia said exasperatedly. "What did I tell you the other day? An awakened man could easily lose his head over his power! That's why a martialist should discipline his mind and control his emotions. I don't want to interfere with your private life, and I don't care how many girls you take home as long as they aren't underage. But these girls... they're still minors! Lust is the first sign of corruption. Do you still not understand?"

So Garcia was more furious about him living a life of debauchery than about taking three young girls home?

"I know, but why would I bring you here if I'm truly corrupted like you said?" Roland said on a sigh. "Don't you think that it doesn't make sense at all?"

"Er..."

"In fact, whether this is true or not, taking three girls home

would inevitably outrage the public. A wise man should make it as secret as possible. However, I invited you here. Don't you think that is a little strange?"

Garcia blinked blankly, slowly putting the phone down, and asked, "Then why?"

Roland heaved a sigh of relief and replied with utmost sincerity, "This is what I'm going to tell you. Miss Garcia... I need your help."

...

Half an hour later.

"So, you don't have any inappropriate relationships with these girls, but instead, you're their... part-time tutor?" Garcia demanded while squinting at Roland.

"Exactly," Roland said truthfully. "They're all college students living nearby. I have to teach them as well as Zero, and it takes too much of my time. People will get suspicious if I keep them here for too long. Normally, girls of their age should have been in school, so I have to constantly bring in new students."

Roland had been always cautious about taking in the God's Punishment Witches. No more than three or four witches were allowed to visit him in Room 0825 at a time so that the neighbors would not be alarmed.

"So they're the 'relatives' whom you needed to take care of during our first meeting?"

"Oi Oi, this is something I said more than half a year ago. Why do you keep reminding me of that?" Roland wondered reproachfully. He then said, "They aren't my real relatives, but we're from the same town," Roland lied unblushingly. "Dawnen, Saint Miran, and Dido used to live in the same village as me. They were still little kids when I left my town."

This explanation would sound obviously flawed in his original world but was actually quite reasonable in here since the Dream

World had Zero's memories.

"Then why didn't their names show up on the registry?"

Roland paused just at the right moment and said, "Because of... their gender."

"I see," Garcia mumbled and fell into silence. When her eyes rested on the three witches again, her demeanor softened. Garcia asked, "Are there many people... like them?"

"Quite a few although things have gotten a little better in past decade," Roland said quickly as he realized that his plan was going better than expected. "People in my village are aware that I joined the Martialist Association. They probably didn't want to stay there for the rest of their lives, so they came to look for me."

"Your... Roland is telling the truth!"

"Please let us stay!"

"I want to go to school."

The three witches pleaded.

Garcia turned away and looked like she was hesitating.

"Neither tutoring nor learning by themselves would solve the fundamental problem. I want them to live a normal life like everyone else. I think you're the only person who could help us," Roland said slowly. Even if Garcia could not help him, the Clover Group must have some power to smuggle them in.

Garcia was apparently thinking the same thing. After what seemed to be a long internal struggle, she sighed deeply, and said, "I'm sorry but I can't help you."

Upon seeing every sign of an interruption from Roland, Garcia explained immediately, "I severed my relationship with my family. Plus, the Clover Group has yet to abandon their plan to demolish this apartment. If I go see him, he would use it as a leverage. I would betray the trust those protesters have put in me."

Roland fell silent when he saw Garcia's clenched fists. He felt guilty to see Garcia be sorry for not being able to help the girls. Roland said, "I understand."

"But you can talk to him yourself," Garcia said and looked up at him. "My father will be holding a party for the outstanding martialists in the city center hotel tomorrow evening. He knows I would not go but he still sent me an invitation. By doing so, he at least shows to the media that he's trying to mend our relationship," Garcia said while smiling bitterly. "Although he didn't invite you directly, you can go there on behalf of me. Just give the party organizer a call and they'll let you in with my invitation card. A proxy could mean an acceptance or a declination. If I choose you as my proxy, he'll know that I declined his offer."

Roland instantly knew what Garcia meant. If Garcia asked her master Lan to represent her then that would be an acceptance.

"Talk to him in person..." Roland mumbled while stroking his chin.

"Are you scared?"

"Regardless, I have to go. I'm so close," Roland answered. As the King of Graycastle, he had attended numerous parties and gained a large amount of experience in dealing with distinguished figures. "I'm just worried he won't help us. He'll probably feel very affronted that you've rejected him."

"Don't worry. My father isn't an unreasonable person. He cares more about business gains than personal loss," Garcia said while smiling. "And you aren't any ordinary martialist. Even Prism City has noticed you. You should give yourself more credit."

Roland dimly understood what Garcia was referring to and said, "I'll do my best."

"To tell you the truth, I'm very glad for you," Garcia said as she rose to her feet and extended her hand to Roland. "You're on the



right track. Sorry that I misunderstood you. I'm very proud to have such an excellent martialist like you as my companion." Garcia paused for a second and then went on, "Also, you can just let me know if you need help in the future, and don't call me Miss Garcia anymore. It doesn't suit you."

Roland slowly reached out his hand and shook hers.

Although Roland lied to Garcia, his goal was still to win the Battle of Divine Will, learn the truth of this world, and liberate humanity from the fate of endless war.

This was the path he had chosen.

# Chapter 1143: The Difference between Martialists

---

As one night in the Dream World was equal to two days in the real world, Roland took the three witches to Crown Hotel the next day evening.

"Your Majesty, is it true that we can eat whatever we want there?" Dawnen asked as she poked her head out of the rear window of his car, her eyes sparkling.

"Of course. It's not that different from the party held by nobles. You should have attended many such parties back in the Union age, right?"

"But you couldn't eat whatever you want at those parties."

"Really?" Roland asked with curiosity.

"Yes," Saint Miran, who was sitting in the passenger seat, supplied the answer with a nod. "Those parties were for prominent figures. They cared more about networking than the feast. Nobody wanted to talk to a person wolfing down food like a savage. You'd become a laughingstock if you did so. If it was a big party, most people would eat something first before going." She swallowed hard and then said, "If Your Majesty fears that we will disgrace you, we'll restrain ourselves."

Roland was amused at the looks of the witches sitting in the back, who were not able to disguise their eagerness in time. He laughed, "Don't worry. I always keep my words. This isn't the Union. You aren't in the king's city either. We're all just normal people. As long as you don't make trouble, eat whatever you like."

"Can... can I bring some food back?" Dido asked with excitement. "Many of my friends wished to attend this first class party."

"Make sure nobody sees you doing that," Roland replied indifferently. "Stay close when we get there. If someone

approaches you, don't get involved in a conversation. Let me deal with them."

"Yes, Your Majesty," the three witches chorused.

Around half an hour later, Roland and his party reached their destination.

Roland immediately understood this was a first-rate party. The vehicles parked in front of the hotel were, without exception, luxurious cars. Their car paint reflected off the lights in the city and formed a glaring contrast between them and Roland's shabby little van.

Although martialists earned a lot of money, they were still not able to compare to real capitalists. To avoid unwelcome attraction, Roland had bought the most common van available on the market. He had not anticipated, however, that his van would become the most eye-catching vehicle among all the fancy cars.

"Sir, the hotel is reserved today. Do you have an invitation card?" A waiter came up to Roland after he parked his car.

Roland produced the card Garcia had given him from his pocket and brandished it triumphantly.

"Welcome to Crown Hotel. The meeting room is on the top floor. A customer representative will soon receive you." The waiter then summoned a smile and said, "I'll take care of your vehicle."

Roland did not care what the waiter actually thought of him, but he had to admit that this was really great service.

He led the witches into the splendid hotel hall. To Roland's surprise, they didn't seem interested in this magnificent building. Perhaps, they had seen architecture like this illuminated by Stones of Lighting many times back in the Taquila age. The chandelier dangling from the ceiling, for instance, was probably nothing special to the Three Chiefs.

Roland found it a little amusing to notice that these three witches

were more awestruck by some cakes than the spectacular hotel interior. Their extremely beautiful appearances, however, soon attracted a lot of people. It seemed that no matter what world he was living in, witches were always going to be the focus of attention.

The customer representative went through a series of security check. He first scanned Roland's invitation card and then reported to someone over his walkie-talkie. Finally, he returned the card to Roland and said, "Mr. Roland, sorry for the wait. May I know who these three ladies are..."

"Cousins," Roand said while shrugging. "Garcia told me that family members are allowed here."

"I see. Please come this way."

The customer service representative guided them to an elevator, pushed the button to the top floor, and then bowed courteously outside the elevator. "I wish you a good evening."

The wall around them soon sank rapidly. A sinking sun diffused its perpetual splendor into the elevator. A dense group of high-rise buildings slid into their sights and formed a forest of walls in the far distance.

The witches finally uttered exclamations of surprise.

"This is even bigger than three Holy Cities put together," Dawnen muttered. "I can't believe mortals built all these without using any magic."

"The Miracle Building you want to build is also in memory of this world, right?" Saint Miran asked Roland.

Roland smiled. Although nobody except Anna knew where he truly came from, the Taquila witches had already reached a mutual understanding that Roland came from a world similar to this Dream World. This seemed to be the only plausible explanation as to why he was so familiar with this world.

After they reached the top floor, the huge round-shaped meeting room materialized in front of them.

Its wall and ceiling were all made of glass. The entire city was dwarfed beneath them through these windows. Roland was mildly impressed with the enormous financial capacity of the Clover Group.

A variety of delicious food was beautifully displayed on plates, including appetizers, desserts, fruits, and champagne towers. There were several hundred guests at the party that formed tight knots throughout the top floor. Apparently, not only martialists but also eminent political figures and businessmen had been invited.

Roland was now very used to this type of situation. The witches, on the other hand, ran straight to the food at the back of the hall.

"Wow... the fish here is so tender. It feels like it's going to melt in my mouth."

"Are these really grapes? Wow, I haven't had such sweet grapes in so long..."

"Rubbish. You just visited the Dream World last month."

"But I ate fast food last time. Elena only knows KFC and McDonald's."

"Hey, remember that we have to also put some food in Dido's bag to bring something back for the others."

Roland looked at the witches who practically salivating at the sight of the delicacies and shook his head in amusement. He suddenly felt that even if he could not benefit from anything in the Dream World, he should at least make this Dream World continue to exist. For him, this was just a world existing in his dream. However, for the Taquila witches, this was the only place where they felt alive.

They could get compensated here for everything they had lost

from the battle with the demons, including the enjoyment of life and mundane pleasures.

Roland started to study the guests intently before the party officially started.

There were two types of guests in the hall. The ones in business attires were clearly important public figures, whereas those wearing robes were martialists from the Association. Although there were exceptions, he, for example, was wearing a suit. Nobody was in outlandish clothes like the last time he had visited Prism City.

Was this the difference between a professional and an amateur?

He somehow remembered what Garcia had once told him.

"Although the Martialist Association is dedicated to saving the world, it's hard to persuade people to work for them with just a vague envision of the future. That's why we started to hold the martialist contest. The contest only has a short history of 50 years, but it has now become the most popular sporting event. Many awakened martialists gained publicity, fame, and wealth through this contest. On the other hand, the Association also recruits many new talents through the competition. The contest thus plays an increasingly important role in the Association. Outstanding contestants are involved in the decision-making process. Because of this change, a rift began to grow among the executives. Gradually, members are divided into two cliques. Nevertheless, this disagreement doesn't impact the contest at all. In fact, the event attracts even more attention."

At that time, Roland favored the more conservative party. Since the martialists' real enemy were the Fallen Evils, the battle against those Fallen Evils must be far more cruel than some sport game. A contest was a good way to recruit new people, but it was essentially not the same as a battle of life and death. Roland did not get why some executives failed to understand this.

Yet when he entered the hall, he suddenly understood the reason.

Both the members of the Association who participated in the contest and the amateurs were defiant brutes that were nothing next to professional, well-educated martialists. Since not everyone would have a chance to fight against the Fallen Evils and, as the battle was often quite intense, more and more people swung to the new party.

Roland believed that the conservative party would only be able to regain its power after what Lan referred to as "erosion" occurred.

Roland twitched his lips at the thought of his hunting license. He had always thought it very strange to license a new martialist. Even though he was an active member, he did not think he was good enough to be one of the top 100 in the Association. Now it dawned on him why the executives licensed him. They viewed him as an ideal old-school martialist who was only seeking the Fallen Evils instead of fame and popularity.

Was this the reason that the conservative party asked him to be their representative?

# Chapter 1144: A Stronger Person

---

While Roland was studying the other guest, somebody was also studying at him.

"How did it go? Did you find anything about him?" Carmen asked his men in an undertone.

"Yes," the latter whispered into his ear. "He's just from an ordinary family. He became Lady Garcia's neighbor purely by accident. There's no record whatsoever of Roland on the contest registry, so I don't think he has ever participated in any games. He joined the Martialist Associations just three months ago, which is highly unusual."

Although Carmen did not possess the Force of Nature, he knew all about the martialist contest. As it was the most popular sporting event among the mass, many people were familiar with its rules and procedure. Apart from the final match, "the Martialist Duel", held every other year, there were also many tournaments and trial games every month to encourage new martialists to enter.

Normally, new martialists were very eager to partake in a contest to improve their skills and rankings so they could gain exposure and money. Only amateur martialists would feel reluctant to showcase their power. Carmen believed that these arrogant amateurs feared to be thrown in a spotlight because they were mostly former criminals.

As Garcia's brother, Carmen was very concerned about the proxy his sister had chosen. Garcia was definitely not a very easygoing person. She was too headstrong. Her obstinacy naturally created a barrier that detached her from the rest of world and made people who attempted to approach her hesitant to further the relationship. With this being the case, Garcia trusted very few people.

Carmen was not remotely surprised at the disagreement between



Garcia and her father. Garcia might be a competent martialist but was definitely not a good businesswoman.

Nevertheless, this was not the main reason he wanted to investigate Roland.

Another more important reason lay in the VIP table at the front of the hall.

He gazed upon the first row and saw a woman in pure white sitting there. She was not wearing any accessories. Her sheet of jet-black hair streamed down and gave her an air of aloofness and sophistication.

This lady, Fei Yuhan, was one of the most talented new martialists in the past five years. She had already successfully entered the final match of the martialist contest twice. Although she had yet to win the championship, most people attributed her defeat to her young age and lack of experience and firmly believed that she would soon gain her first championship. It was rumored that Fei Yuhan, as a genius martialist of the new generation, would eventually become another executive in the Prism City after she won her championship match.

Carmen did not expect a proud person like her to attend this party. Her attendance really gave Carmen's father a pleasant surprise.

This party would definitely make the front page because of Fei Yuhan's presence.

However, when Carmen had finally found a chance to talk to Fei Yuhan, he had been given an unexpected task.

Carmen calmed himself down and ambled over to the lady

"Miss Fei Yuhan, what you asked me to do..."

"I heard your conversation," Fei Yuhan interrupted Carmen and gave him a faint smile. "Thank you."

Carmen was astonished at her acute hearing. She was at least 10 meters away from him and surrounded by the buzz in the hall. Could normal people really do that?

"I didn't hear everything you said. Even though I could hear them, I need time to process the information," Fei Yuhan explained to him good-naturedly in response to Carmen's shocked expression. "When your men approached you, I concentrated my mind and read the conversation based on the movement of his lips and voices. Most martialists possess some lip-reading skills."

"I-I see... You're indeed the best martialist in the country," Carmen said as he managed a smile.

"The best?" she echoed in a silvery voice. "I haven't got that cup yet."

"It's just a matter of time. Nobody except you has managed to enter the final match within one year of awakening and this even includes the 'guard' of Prism City..." His voice trailed off as he spoke.

Fei Yuhan was listening, but the nonchalant smile on her face clearly told Carmen that she had no intention of continuing with this conversation. She listened to him patiently only because it would be rude not to.

Then it suddenly dawned on Carmen that she had actually wanted to end the conversation when she had said "thank you". She gave him an explanation simply because he was the organizer of this party. Nonetheless, she did not have the slightest interest in engaging in a personal interaction.

At this thought, Carmen felt a surge of anger blazing inside him. As the representative of the Clover Group, he had never been so slighted.

But Carmen managed to control his temper.

The Clover Group could not offend the Martialist Association, as

the latter had an intertwined relationship with various governmental bodies and industries.

This was the exact reason his father put so much money in networking with these people.

Carmen smiled stiffly and walked off.

Fei Yuhan obviously noticed the affronted look in Carmen's eyes.

She did not really care about what others thought of her. The only person she could rely on was herself to defend against the erosion. Wealth and power meant nothing to her.

Her eyes were back on Roland again.

She attended this party just because her master had asked her to. At first, she did not understand why she had to sacrifice her training sessions for such a superfluous networking event, until a man caught her attention.

Once an Awakened reached a certain level, they would be able to know how strong their opponent was. Fei Yuhan had gained such an ability three years ago. She noticed that very few people outside of Prism City were stronger than her.

Nevertheless, she could not read anything out of that person.

She sensed Roland's conduct, the tone in which he spoke, the expression on his face, and the micromovement of his skin, which were exactly the same as those of a normal person, but she could not sense any fluctuations in his power. Therefore, she could not figure out how strong Roland was. Common people normally did not have the Force of Nature, however, Roland was a martialist.

That was why Fei Yuhan had asked Carmen for help.

Although she could do the investigation herself, she preferred to have others take care of these matters for her. Most people were more than happy to help her and, often, did a better job.

Then, she heard Carmen slip that man's name, Roland.

Everything seemed to make sense now.

A week ago, Fei Yuhan had learned a piece of news from her master that there was a new "hunter", a licensed martialist, in Prism City. Fei Yuhan was not surprised at the news because an outstanding martialist who fought against the Fallen Evils deserved some privileges. It wasn't until a little later that she learned that this new licensed martialist was not an old member but instead a newbie!

This incident would have definitely stirred the whole martialist community had the Association not kept the personal information of licensed martialists strictly confidential. Licensed martialists were typically viewed as equal to champions of the martialist contest, and were sometimes even more respected by the public. This was like telling Fei Yuhan that some newly awakened martialist had just snatched the champion cup from her. How outrageous!

If that was the case, her two entries in the championship final suddenly seemed to not matter as much.

The new hunter's name was Roland.

Fei Yuhan balled her right hand into a fist, but kept her face expressionless.

As a student of an old guard in Prism City, Fei Yuhan had also heard about the disagreement between new and old martialists. One of the main questions they argued about was which school of martialists was the stronger one. Were those who put their lives on the line and trained themselves through numerous battles against the Fallen Evils stronger than combatants on the stage, or vice versa?

Fighting against Fallen Evils was indeed challenging, but the chance of encountering a Fallen Evil was slim, and more often than not, the first battle would also be the last for a lot of fighters. Combatants, on the other hand, could train themselves in a more

safe manner. However, as they were used to the way they fought, they would easily panic when coming across a difficult enemy. Both theories had a great number of supporters, and it was hard to tell which one was truer in practice.

However, Fei Yuhan now found a way to find that out.

Roland, who had never participated in any matches and had been continuously fighting against Fallen Evils since his awakening, was definitely an old-school martialist.

Compared to Roland, Fei Yuhan was obviously considered as a modern martialist.

Her master intended for her to come to this party, probably in hopes that Roland and she, as the representatives of traditional and modern martialists, could get to know each other.

However, Fei Yuhan had no interest in involving herself in the conflict within the Association. She never thought she was a modern martialist. In fact, she would have fought against Fallen Evils if her master had not explicitly forbidden her to do so.

Just like Roland.

She only cared about who was stronger.

And Roland seemed to be a decent competitor.

Fei Yuhan would have known how big her chance of winning had she been able to detect Roland's power. However, since she could not, it was hard for her to envision the duel between them.

In other words, they were tied.

Fei Yuhan curled up her lips. It appeared that this party had become a little more interesting.

She had also overheard some interesting conversations between the three girls Roland brought to the party.

She heard words like "the Dream World".

Also something like "His Majesty".

Was this some new trendy game?

However, judging from the three girls' looks, she did not think they were doing some juvenile role-playing either.

She decided to ask Roland in person.

Fei Yuhan quickly came up with a few questions in her mind.

...

In the meantime, Roland finally found the person whom he was looking for.

Garcia's father got a resounding round of applause as he ascended the stage at the center of the hall.

# Chapter 1145: A Deal and A Strange Phenomenon

---

"So that man is..." Dawen muttered unclearly as she was too busy wolfing down the cake she had thrust into her mouth.

"Yes, that's the man we saw on the paper," Roland replied with a nod. He had done some research on the Clover Group before coming here. The man on the stage was Garde, one of the directors and president of the Department of Construction of the Clover Group. As Garcia's father, he was the fifth child of his family.

He expected to see King Wimbledon III, but now it appeared that Zero had not killed the poor King of Graycastle. Roland also realized a fact that the residents in the Building of Soul had now completely blended into this Dream World and developed their own memories and personal relationships. There was no way to know whether Garcia came before Garde, whether the existence of Garcia resulted in the appearance of the Clover Group, or whether Garcia was just a jigsaw puzzle piece that randomly fit in this whole picture. Had Roland not had the memories of the other world, he would have probably also thought this Dream World was a world of reality.

Although the Dream World was currently changing in a direction unfamiliar to him, it was essentially based on his own memories. The increasingly bizarre phenomena thus constantly reminded him that he was in his dream.

For example, Garcia's real last name was Wimbledon. However, in the Dream World, her last name was Gar. Unlike Cobb in the movie Inception who needed some personal articles to help him distinguish the dream from the real world, Roland did not require such things to do so.

Garde's speech was all about his gratitude and support to the martialist attending the party. He also, very incidentally,

mentioned her estranged daughter. Just as Garcia had predicted, Garde felt sorry about his daughter's absence and expressed his wish to mend their relationship.

The hall erupted in a resounding applause. The journalists danced around taking photographs. Blinding flashlights came with every shot.

Roland jeered.

This party was totally unnecessary. Garde only needed to abandon his plan to destroy the apartment or well compensate the residents to win Garcia back.

After the speech, Garde made toasts.

This was the moment Roland had been waiting for.

"Let's go. We'll come back later," he beckoned the witches and walked up to Garde with a glass of champagne in his hand.

...

"President He, thank you for coming to my party. I'll still need your support for the Green Project."

"Naturally, naturally. We've been working together for so many years."

"Miss Yuhan, do you like the new stadium we built for the championship match on the south side of the city?"

"I haven't been there yet."

"Oh... haha. I'm sure you'll make it there this year."

Roland went straight up to Garde as the latter finished his toasts to the honored guests at the front and made his way through the crowd.

"You're..." Garde asked hesitantly.

"I'm Roland, Garcia's proxy," Roland said flatly.

"Oh, I see... Nice to meet you," Garde said as he took a glass of



wine from a waiter and tightened his demeanor immediately into formality. "You're really lucky to have the Force of Nature. I do envy you young guys."

Roland clanked his glass with Garde's but did not drink his champagne. He said, "I want to talk with you, in private."

This invitation seemed pretty rude. Roland, as a newly-awakened martialist, was much younger than Garde, and also had a much lower social and economic status compared to a director of a large financial group.

Garde frowned and replied, "Sorry, I'm expected by someone else."

"Garcia asked me to talk to you. Aren't you interested in how your daughter is doing these days at all?" Roland said as he raised his voice.

Out of the corner of his eye, he noticed that some journalists started to look in their direction.

Roland was confident that Garde would come with him.

Otherwise, he would soon ruin his carefully managed reputation of being a loving father.

"Alright," Garde receded resignedly, "if this isn't going to be long."

"Of course. It won't take you much time," said Roland smilingly.

There was a VIP room in the hall. After all the guards withdrew, only Garde, Roland, and Garde's secretary were left in the room.

"Is it OK to have him here?" Roland asked while casting a glance at the elderly secretary. "What I'm going to say involves the interest of your company."

"That's fine. He's been working for my family for several decades," Garde said glumly. "I'm more concerned about the three pretty little girls you brought here than my secretary. This isn't an

amusement park."

As soon as they were well out of earshot, Garde no longer disguised his impatience and annoyance.

Roland knew that Garde was very alarmed. Judging from his stance and position, Roland believed that Garde also possessed awakened power.

"The matter we're discussing in next few minutes concerns these three girls..." Roland answered with a shrug. "Let's cut the crap. I want to make a deal with you. They're illegal immigrants, and I need you to help them obtain legal status and send them to a reputable high school."

Garde lapsed into a long silence. At last, he said, "Is this all that you want?"

If Garde was just some ordinary businessman, he would have probably flared up and walked away. The fact that he waited for Roland to finish his story indicated that he was well bred and civil.

"Yes," Roland said defiantly. "I don't think it's hard for the Clover Group."

"You said it's a deal, so what can you offer me? Are you going to oppose Garcia or persuade her to abandon that apartment to me?"

"No, I'm her friend."

After Roland had found out that the apartment was where all the memory fragments were, Roland was determined to protect it. Anyone who attempted to demolish the building would face a relentless resistance from 300 Taquila witches. The witches could easily, for example, disassemble the track of an excavator or create an illusion that the building was haunted.

"Hmm... friends," Garde jeered. "Then we have nothing to talk about."

"Not necessarily," Roland said as he produced his hunting license

from his pocket and brandished it at Garde.

"This is..." Garde's expression instantly changed. He turned to his secretary inquiringly.

The secretary stared at the license for quite a while before he slowly confirmed, "It's legit."

"How come you have that..."

"That's top secret information of the Association that you aren't entitled to," Roland talked over Garde. In fact, he did not even know how the Association approved and issued licenses. "You just need to know what it stands for."

Garde gazed at Roland darkly. He fumbled with the cigar that he distractedly took out from his inner pocket and spoke at last, "My daughter seems to have made her acquaintance with an extraordinary person. Mr. Roland, the Martialist Association is a law-abiding organization..."

"Do you think I'm threatening you?" Roland said with a determined sigh. "Like I said, this is a deal."

"So you mean..."

"A successful businessman like you must have encountered many difficulties, right? You may remove enemies standing right before you but not those in hiding," Roland said as he stuck out one finger. "I can take care of that for you, though not everyone. They have to be underground criminals. Also, their presence has to constitute a threat. I have my own ways to conduct my investigation, so don't you attempt to fool me. In this way, the Association would not notice our deal. I would rather keep this conversation between ourselves."

In short, Roland was going to crack down on criminal groups.

The capture of these large criminal organizations usually involved a lengthy process, which included collecting evidence, ambushing, arrests, and trials. As such, companies normally

preferred to resort to force to avoid substantial financial loss. From Garde's look, Roland already knew he had had many unfortunate encounters with these criminals.

Garde said hesitantly, " Mr. Roland, if you're serious, then that wouldn't be a good deal for you."

Roland stifled his smile. Garcia was right. Her father was not only a "reasonable person" but also a wise one.

"Just see them as your deposit. I'm going to ask you to help these three first. The total number would be around 300."

"300... illegal immigrants?" Garde echoed in disbelief. "The police will get suspicious..."

"Take it slow. I don't need you to do it anytime soon. Take your time. This is a long-term project," said Roland. who believed, as Celine had suggested, that not every witch liked studying. For example, Elena and Phyllis would prefer to kill Fallen Evils with him much more than poring over books.

"In that case, I may be able to help you."

"Well then, I look forward to working with you."

The deal was sealed after the secretary took pictures of the witches. Although they had not signed an agreement in any form, Roland was certain that Garde would not break his promise.

When Roland was about to leave with the witches, Garde suddenly shouted behind him. "Hey, wait..."

"Is there anything else I can help you with?" Roland said while turning around.

"My daughter, Garcia, how is she?" Garde asked after a moment of hesitation. "I called her many times, but she didn't pick up..."

"Rest assured. She's doing very well," Roland replied.

...

Garde finally ignited the cigar after the door was closed. He muttered to his secretary, "Is he really just some random martialist?"

"I have the same feeling," the secretary, who had been keeping his silence throughout the conversation, said, "He talked to you with an air of undisguised condescension."

Common people would usually talk to him in a timid, unctuous tone or tried to be audacious while pretending that they were not afraid of the huge social and economic difference between them. Garde did not think it was the Force of Nature that made Roland fearless, because he had just awakened.

Nevertheless, Garde had not noticed any signs of such timidity in Roland. On the very contrary, he was confident, relaxed, and even a little haughty. It was as though he had seen much of life already.

How could that be possible? Roland was around the same age as Garcia. A man in his twenties!

For the first time in his life, Garde could not figure out a person.

...

"You didn't have to negotiate with him yourself," Saint Miran mumbled after they left the room. "You're the king of the two worlds. It's really rude of him to stare at you like that."

"If Lady Alethea were here, she would have put a knife to his throat," Dido agreed.

"As a king, you can do whatever you want," Dawnen said disapprovingly. "Lady Alice never cared about what other people thought of her."

Roland was amused at the bold speech of these "little girls." "My ministers can't get in here, and I've told you not to call me 'Your Majesty' outside."

"Yes, brother Roland," the three witches said together instantly.

"By the way, are we still going back?" Dawnen eagerly looked at the new servings on the table as she licked her lips.

"The feast doesn't end until midnight, but we might as well head back soon. The other witches are waiting for us," Roland said as he stared up at the darkened sky. "We'll stay another half an hour and then we'll set off at 8:00 sharp."

"As you command!" the three of them chorused and sprinted up to the table.

" They do look like underage kids ," Roland thought to himself. He shuffled behind them and was about to drink his champagne when he realized he still had to drive, and dejectedly put down the glass.

Just then, the pale, golden champagne suddenly changed.

A red swirl of ink suddenly appeared in his glass and gradually formed creepy, crooked words!

"Don't forget what you promised me."

A chill ran down Roland's spine.

He fought down the urge to throw the glass away.

Roland was holding the wine glass with such immense strength that its stem cracked!

Roland, once again, peered down at his champagne and discovered that the threatening words had vanished. The liquid was a pure, crystal-clear pale-gold again. It looked as though nothing had happened.

# Chapter 1146: In the Name of Rose

---

An ominous sense of foreboding flooded over Roland. Somebody was obviously watching him in this Dream World.

Roland looked up and scanned the faces of everyone across the hall.

Who was doing this?

A waiter? An entrepreneur? Or an Awakened?

Everyone seemed to be enjoying themselves at this party. He was the only person being paranoid here.

Roland took a deep breath to calm himself down.

The messenger must be the same person who had left the note in the book.

"Rose Café, No. 302."

Without a doubt, this person wanted to meet him.

This was something beyond the Force of Nature. Unlike witches who possessed various supernatural abilities, martialists were physically faster, sharper, and more powerful than common people. They could, to some extent, release their energy to create some sort of magic, but, overall, they were more combatants than wizards.

Plus, Roland did not sense any fluctuations in the Force of Nature.

In other words, those words were more likely a result of some other unknown, more superior power.

Which was probably what made the Dream World transform.

"Hmm... some non-player character is apparently keeping an eye on me," Roland said under his breath. The time in the Dream World was frozen when Roland was awake, so Roland believed,

other than the visiting witches and those defeated by Zero, everybody else was fictitious. No matter how "real" they seemed to be, they were controlled and manipulated by the creator of this world. Now, that creator seemed to have noticed Roland's presence and sent him a message.

"When did this start?" Roland wondered.

Was it from the moment he had borrowed the book from Garcia, or the moment he had found the person in the Reflection Church, who had been dead for over 800 years, look exactly the same as Lan in the Dream World?

Or had it started even earlier when he and Zero had fought the Battle of Souls.

Roland had absolutely no idea.

He did not want to dwell on this matter either.

The more important thing was what that creator was trying to convey.

"Roland?" Dawnen's voice pulled Roland back to the present. "Are you OK?"

"Yes... I'm fine," Roland said, a little flustered. While shaking his head, he said smilingly, "I'm coming."

After making sure that the wine glass was back to normal, Roland put it down on the table closest to him and followed the witches.

"You should try this. It's so tender, but you have to wait for a while..."

Saint Miran handed Roland some barbequed French foie gras that smelled amazing.

Roland felt very embarrassed when he saw the three witches dominate the tables and take all the food the chef had just served.

Some ladies in the hall started to complain.



Their voices were carried back to Roland —

"Who brought them here?" "They're pretty cute, but they look as though they haven't eaten for ages." "Look at what they're wearing. I hope they aren't some little tramps." "Poor things. It's like they've been starving for hundreds of years."

Roland gave those gossiping women a cool stare. He did not even bother asking them to stop.

"Sorry, but yes, they literally haven't eaten for hundreds of years."

"We ought to bring some of these to our friends."

"Right!"

Roland lapsed into thought again as he chewed the barbequed French fois gras distractedly.

Since the creator had enormous power, why did he not talk to him in person? Why did he make everything so difficult?

Did he fear that he would frighten Roland, or he did not have such an opportunity?

Roland did not think that the creator really cared about his poor nerves. The message in his wine had indeed scared the hell out of him.

He thought of the note in the book again.

"We'll meet when we receive divine revelation." Roland ran these words through his head several times and gasped out. "Does it refer to..."

The arrival of the Bloody Moon?

The appearance of the Bloody Moon marked the beginning of the Battle of Divine Will.

So, he could only talk to the messenger at that time?

But how come a person in the Dream World would know things

in the other? Time remained frozen in this world if Roland chose not to come here.

Even if they were supposed to meet when the Bloody Moon appeared, Roland still had no idea where they were going to meet up.

God only knew where the hell the Rose Café was.

Why not just meet in the apartment or some other well-known building?

While Roland was complaining internally, two middle-aged businessmen walked past him.

"I heard that you're going to build a new golf course?"

"It has been just approved. I put tons of money into it. Do you play golf, Mr. Gao?"

"Sometimes. I'm not big on sports, but I'm more interested in the master you recently hired. Someone told me that you just gave three million away."

"I had to. It's all about luck. You know how important luck is for us. I can always earn more money, and I've heard that the names given by that master always bring huge profits."

"So what is it called?"

"Green Meadow. It's right across from the Clover Group's green project."

"Haha, such a pleasant coincidence."

Roland stood still. He did not hear a single word of their subsequent conversation.

"That's right! You can always give it a name yourself!"

For the past few weeks, he had been asking the witches to look for the Rose Café, but he had forgotten one thing — he could totally open a coffeeshop and name it Rose Café.

If that person really wanted to talk to him, he should not have picked a place Roland had never heard of.

If that person had the power to write in his wine, he would certainly know about Roland's new café.

Roland had already taken over the second floor of the warehouse. He simply needed to rent another two venues next door to open his coffeeshop.

He could even combine these venues into a huge room, add necessary amenities such as tables, chairs and a bar counter, and set the room number as 302!

The Taquila witches could be both waitresses and customers.

Roland quickly made up his mind after he did a rough calculation of his current funds.

...

Fei Yuhan picked up Roland's wine glass after the latter left the party.

She had seen that this new licensed hunters wrench the glass away in great shock, but catch it just in time. It was as though it was not a glass of champagne, but a piece of red hot coal. For a split second, she had even seen Roland freak out.

What would make a licensed hunter so unnerved?

Fei Yuhan could not think of anything.

Even death would not frighten him so much.

And this was just a glass of wine.

Fei Yuhan was not sure if this was just her imagination.

But she did see cracks in the globet stem, which indicated that Roland had lost control of himself. Only newly awakened martialists would make such errors.

She thus judged that what ever Roland had seen was definitely

something extraordinary.

Fei Yuhan sniffed the rim of the glass but did not perceive any noticeable odor. Roland had not touched the champagne, which meant what had shocked him had nothing to do with the wine itself.

She slowly gulped down the wine and confirmed her theory.

This was just ordinary wine.

She was more curious about Roland's reaction at that very moment than his ridiculous conversation with the three girls, which includes words like "the king of the two worlds" and "my ministers", because at that moment, Roland was real.

Something must have happened at that time.

Fei Yuhan put down the glass and looked at the entrance of the hall. Her gaze was burning with curiosity.

# Chapter 1147: A Picture Underneath the Sand

---

When Roland strolled out of his bedroom the next morning and entered the castle hall, the Taquila witches all raised their arms in a kind of salute to pay their highest respects to the king.

"Good morning, Your Majesty. Thank you for your hospitality."

"I would say it was the greatest experience I've had in the past hundred years."

"I'll be looking forward to my next visit to the Dream World when the time comes."

"... What happened last night?" Anna asked curiously as she looked at the God's Punishment Witches who apparently had yet to come out of their blissful reveries.

"A sumptuous party," Roland answered smilingly. Dido and Dawnen had almost ravaged half of the table and crammed the invisible bag with tons of delicacies. Fortunately, nobody had really cared about the food they had taken. Had this been an ordinary buffet, they probably would have been thrown out of the party outright by angry waiters.

"That makes me hungry too," Anna said as her stomach protested mildly. "When can I have that kind of food?"

While staring into Anna's expectant blue eyes, Roland stroked her graceful head gently and said, "In a few years. I promise."

Ingredients were the key to accessing luxurious food. Fast transportation enabled people in the modern society to obtain food from all parts of the world. If they wanted to eat fresh sea urchin from the Port of Clearwater, the boats on the inner river should at least travel two to three faster than they currently did.

Of course, an alternative way was to drive the demons out of the

Fertile Plains and fly around Graycastle on the "Seagull" to try out different food if the former method was not an option.

Roland had his usual breakfast that consisted of an egg, bread, and a glass of Chaos Drink, which was really not a satisfactory breakfast compared to what he used to have in his original world. However, considering that the Taquila witches were still relying on tasteless, high-calorie rations to sustain themselves, Roland emptied his plate.

After breakfast, Anna bade Roland a quick farewell and left for the laboratory on the North Slope. Like most of the members of the Witch Union, she now hardly had any leisure time in Neverwinter or at the front. Roland returned to his office and strode over to the French window. He saw a few witches pass through the front yard below. They had now completely blended in with the community and were working together strenuously with common people for the future of the human race.

Just then, Nightingale pushed open the door and entered.

"Mail from the garrison at Festive Harbor," she said as she dropped a thick paper bag on Roland's desk. "I met Sean downstairs. He wanted to give you this."

"Quite heavy, isn't it?" Roland said as he picked up a pair of scissors.

"They probably shipped the package here by sea," Nightingale said as she walked past Roland and drew out a bag of pickled dried fish from a drawer. "I checked it. It's safe to open."

Roland unwrapped the package and dumped the contents on his desk. Apart from a letter and a stack of drawings, there were also some "stones" sealed in a few bags. They looked pretty similar to the samples provided by Rex the other day.

Roland's brows furrows as he skimmed through the letter. The report by the First Army startled him. The so-called ancient ruin

was not just confined to the underwater cave but it actually infiltrated the entire Endless Cape!

Under Roland's order, the garrison at Festive Harbor immediately followed Simbady into the ruin and blasted the entire cave. Infuriated, the Giant Armored Scorpion came out of hiding and was later bombarded by the machine gun squad and the mortar unit before it could launch an attack on the soldiers.

This result was by no means surprising. What surprised him, however, was the subsequent exploration to the cave.

The engineering team noticed that the ground within a radius of several hundred meters sank to various degrees as a result of the explosion. From the enclosed drawings, Roland saw the beach slope downward as though the ground had caved in.

Shortly afterwards, the First Army conducted a few more explosions and excavated the ground before they found 16 similar ruins in the vicinity of Festive Harbor. The area covered by these ruins was as large as seven or eight ports put together.

Due to the limited manpower, the people of the Sand Nation had only cleaned up three ruins. The findings at the three locations were amazingly similar. Tablet walls five to ten meters' thick were found at each ruin underneath the desert, whereas the area uncovered by the walls was carpeted with leafy grass.

Roland fell silent after he saw the drawings.

First of all, he had to admit that this was great news.

With so many tablets, they could now produce as many tracers as possible.

In addition to manufacturing tracers, Roland also thought of many other potential applications of these unique electric silicides, such as pressure gauges, lighters, quartz clocks, etc.

Also, Celine would now be able to replicate the Magic Cube with the tablets discovered in this exploration.

However, the implications behind these findings sent a chill down Roland's spine.

How many tablets in total were there at the Endless Cape if there were already so many at Festive Harbor? If these tablets were really the bodies of some ancient silicon-based creatures, what kind of massacre occurred?

The fact that the geological features of the three ruins were almost identical indicated that they had been formed at around the same time.

Roland used his imagination to see how these ruins had come into being.

The desertification was probably not caused by the evaporation of water. Perhaps, the Silver Stream used to be a fertile land rather than an underground river.

Everything had, however, changed when a massive war had broken out.

The tablet men had been slaughtered by the radiation people, whose bodies littered the entire continent. According to the murals in the Temple of the Cursed, the radiation people had won the God's relic and obtained the final victory.

What concerned Roland most was the aftermath of this huge Battle of Divine Will.

As those bodies were silicon-based, they did not decay like those of carbon-based animals. These bodies had thus formed towering walls, which had subsequently blocked rivers and crushed trees. This rendered the whole land uninhabitable for all vegetation, except for some vines that struggled to live in the cracks of rocks.

The Southernmost Region had been, hence, destroyed.

Nevertheless, mother nature was kind.

Whether organic or not, everything would eventually become a



part of this world.

Hundreds of years later, the bodies were reduced to sand after years of exposure to wind, and that was how the desertification had begun. The vines living in the cracks of rocks had gradually died out over the years. Plants were obliterated except those who were not covered by bodies. The plants that survived strived and thrived in the desert and turned sand back into earth.

The whole process had taken thousands of years.

During those thousands of years, the bodies on the top turned into the desert they saw today. The lower ones, however, piled up and formed the bank. Since the sand on the top constantly moved about, the pressure applied to the tablets below were subject to constant change. As such, those tablets illuminated and extinguished alternatively, which made it really hard for plants down there to grow. Nonetheless, some species did survive the harsh environment. As for the land uncovered by the tablets, they had eventually become the Silver Stream Oasis where the Ironsand people of the Mojin Clan had settled down and prospered.

In other words, both Iron Sand City and Festive Harbor were sitting on the top of weathered corpses.

Roland shuddered at this hypothesis.

He really hoped that he was wrong.

If the Battle of Divine Will would never end, how many people would have to die?

Down in the earth and in the depths of the ocean...

There was probably not a single acre of land that hadn't been soaked in blood.

# Chapter 1148: Camilla's Return

---

"Hey, Roland..." Nightingale's voice jerked Roland out of his thoughts. "Are you OK?"

"Er, is anything wrong?" Roland said after a clearing throat.

"You were staring at that paper for a good several minutes, and you don't look very well either. Terrible news?"

"No, I hope that I am wrong," Roland said while shaking his head and briefly recounted his theory. "If that was the truth, what a dismal world we're living in."

Another problem that alarmed Roland was how short their lives were. One life cycle was just a fleeting second compared to the history of this planet that stretched thousands of years before the emergence of lifeforms.

Where had human beings and demons been when the radiation people and the tablet men had fought furiously for their survival?

If the Battle of Divine Will was unending, then how does one win?

No matter how fierce the battle had been, there should have been a winner in the end.

Why had both parties disappeared?

Roland suddenly regarded this battle with a sense of evil foreboding.

"I see..." Nightingale mumbled thoughtfully. "But even if you're right, I think there's still a solution."

Roland looked toward her in surprise and asked, "What solution?"

"Well, I have to make it clear first. I'm not Anna, so it may be just some random crazy idea. Don't you laugh at me, alright?"

"I won't," Roland promised.

Nightingale shoved a piece of dried fish into her mouth and said, "First of all, you have to admit that this is going to be a problem that will take at least two generations. So the most important task now was to pass on the information until the time is right."

"Right... that's true," Roland said, nodding. "Then what?"

"That's it."

"Huh?" Roland gaped.

"Because by that time, this battle will have nothing to do with us," Nightingale replied matter-of-factly. "We can only live once and already have so much to worry about in this life. Why do we want to let something that will only happen after we die bother us now? Whether our descendents would succeed or not and how they are going to do that are their problems. There's no point of us doing their jobs for them."

Roland could not help grinning. So, was Nightingale comforting him? Anyway, this solution was straightforward, simple and overall, very Nightingale-ish.

"Are you gloating over my shortsightedness?" Nightingale demanded while squinting her eyes at Roland.

"No," Roland denied and immediately put on a straight a face. "That was very incisive."

"Hmm, that sounds more or less right," Nightingale said with satisfaction as she held her head a little higher. "If you fear our descendents couldn't do a good job, ask the other races for help."

"How?"

"Reconstruct the ruin and record the Battle of Divine Will as this is another way to pass on information. Didn't you find out the existence of the radiation people and tablet men from the murals in the Temple of the Cursed? Build some underground fortresses in

Graycastle and carve the wall to inform the later generations who participate in the war. If time permits, I believe there will be one or two races figuring out what they should do."

Roland was momentarily stunned at Nightingale's insight. Even if human beings were exterminated in the end, they could still preserve their culture and civilization in an alternate way. If some race in the future managed to terminate the endless wars with the help of this information, they would definitely carve a glorious place for humanity in their history.

Perhaps, Nightingale herself didn't even realize how important this was for the future generations.

After a long silence, Roland shook his head in amusement, poured her a glass of Chaos Drink, and said, 'I'm very impressed with your idea. I didn't expect you to think this far ahead.'

"I don't need to hear the latter half of your comment," Nightingale said defiantly and snatched up the glass.

Roland admitted that if he failed, this would be his last resort. Although, personally, he would rather be the recorder of history than the history itself.

He then summoned Sean and asked him to send the stones in the package to Celine before he commenced his work. In the afternoon, Graycastle greeted a person Roland had been longing to see for a long time.

He met Camilla Dary, the butler of the Sleeping Island, in the castle.

To Roland's surprise, Camilla did not come with Tilly. Travel-strained from head to toe, Camilla looked particularly disheveled.

This indicated that she went straight to the castle after the ship disembarked.

It was apparently not a good sign.

"Did you just get here?" Roland asked as he poured a cup of tea for Camilla. "You've had a long journey. How was Thunder's exploration?"

Camilla drained the cup and nearly choked in her cup. "Something went wrong at the Shadow Islands. Joan...Joan disappeared!"

"Disappeared?" Roland echoed, his heart sank rapidly, and he exchanged a dark look with Nightingale. "What happened exactly? Slow down. Tell me what happened."

...That was what happened." It took Camilla half an hour to finish her story. "We floated on the sea for two days, but Joan didn't come back. Thunder said only you would know what happened to Joan undersea. Are those floating pillars and the distorted space real?"

"This is incredible!"

Roland rubbed his forehead in a painful sort of way. The more he probed into this world, the stranger it turned out to be. The bizarre phenomena in the Dream World had already confused him a lot, and it appeared the real world was equally mysterious.

The lengthened stone pillars and fishes did not seem to be a result of external forces, the evidence to which was that neither Camilla nor Joan had experienced excruciating pain when Joan's fingers had elongated.

Both of them were physically fine.

The only possibility Roland could think of was that the space was distorted in the depth of the ocean.

Although it sounded pretty outlandish and there was not a shred of evidence to support his theory, Roland knew he had to provide some reasonable explanation to Camilla. The fact that Camilla directly sought him for advice instead of Tilly showed that she was worried about Joan's safety. From her bloodshot eyes, Roland

judged that she had not slept well for the past few days. Perhaps, she was not only concerned about Joan but also blamed herself for Joan's disappearance.

So, he had to say something.

Roland had seen even stranger things before, such as a Sealine perpendicular to the horizon, so a distorted space would not be as nearly peculiar as the former.

He mopped his forehead fidgetedly and spoke at long last, "I think Thunder was right."

Camilla instantly held up her head and asked, "Do you also think Joan's still alive?"

"Yes, and she's probably now to the east of the Sealine."

"So, she transported herself somewhere thousands of miles away? Is that... possible?"

"That's only my guess here, but one thing is certain, that the water level of the Shadow Waters did drop, right? The change in the water level even impacts the tides at the Fjord Islands, which indicates that it's a great amount of water we're talking about here. So, where did the seawater go?" Roland said more to himself than Camilla as he picked up a quill and drew a circle on a piece of paper. "I gather they went to the east of the Sealine."

Camilla thought for a while and said, "Thunder did say that the seawater near the Sealine were heading westward."

"Because if the water didn't go there, the Swirling Sea would have dried out after two or three tidal cycles," Roland said as he drew another circle several inches apart from the first one. "The question is, if the water was transported from one place to another, the tides should have come at intervals. However, in fact, the water currents are moving continuously. To make this happen, the water must go through these two circles at almost the same time. So, what's the fastest way to travel from one circle to

another?"

Camilla ran her finger on the area between the two circles with uncertainty and asked tentatively, "Go straight?"

"In theory, yes," Roland said as he drew a straight line, "but there's another possibility." He then folded the paper, and then the two circles overlapped. "In this way, the water can get to the other side almost instantly."

Camilla gasped, "How... how can that be possible?"

"It is weird, but magic itself isn't something science can explain. For example, Nightingale can transport herself from one place to another in a second and walk through solid walls, which is not something common sense can explain either."

"..." Camilla fell silent.

"Also, although it's now just a hypothesis, one thing you mentioned is quite interesting," Roland said as he thrust the quill through the circles. "You see that this quill has traveled from the front to the back. However, in reality, it traveled in a straight line. So, back to the fish. If the fish traveled thousands of miles within a second, what would you see?"

Camilla muttered uncertainly, "It... shrank?"

"Correct. Things that are far away always look significantly smaller than those close to you. Therefore, the fish didn't elongate. The reason you saw it being stretched was that its body had been thousands of miles away from you."

"Oh..." Camilla heaved a deep sigh and looked much more relieved. "If the other side is also the ocean, Joan should be able to survive."

Roland nodded.

"Thank you..." Camilla said weakly then suddenly swung sideways and fell to the floor.

Nightingale caught her just in time.

"She must have been worn out."

"Take her to the Witch Building. I'll let Tilly know."

"Yup," Nightingale said as she carried Camilla under the crook of her arm and vanished into the Mist.



# Chapter 1149: A Challenger under the Sky

---

A glowing sun sank slowly behind the mountains and laid orangish-red stripes over the vast land below.

Unlike the Red Mist, this particular shade of red was pure and untainted.

Ursrook liked to ascend the peak of the mountain and bask in a slanting beam of sunshine while admiring the sky above him.

He could have flown higher, but he did not want his magic power to break the momentary silence under the canopy of the dusky sky.

He felt the sky, flooded with sheets of red and purple lights and interspersed with gilded clouds, was now almost within his reach.

It was a very rare experience.

Most of the time, he was enveloped by the Red Mist hovering over his head. Although he liked the Red Mist, it created a barrier between him and the sky.

He was probably one of the few of his kind who did not like staying at the Birth Tower.

Yet Ursrook did not regard himself as an outlander.

He simply had a greater desire for magic power than anyone else.

Yes, magic power came from the sky.

Human beings called it the Bloody Moon, which was somewhat correct.

It was rumored that his race would have an ultimate upgrade after they inherited God's power, upon which they would be elevated from the earth to Heaven.

Without a shadow of a doubt, a broader expanse of land was awaiting them.

Perhaps, that was where God lived.

By then, they would receive immense magic power, which would further lead them to immortality.

Ursrook did not completely believe in this theory.

He had once tried to leap high into the air.

Unfortunately, due to the lack of the Red Mist, when he had reached a certain altitude, he had experienced a series of physical dysfunctions such as a rapid drop in his body temperature, frosted armor, slow blood circulation, and difficulty in breathing. If he had used his magic power to fix these problems, he would have quickly run out of his power.

He had once attempted to go as far as he could and almost died during that audacious flight.

Nevertheless, his desire for the sky grew even stronger.

Because in the midst of the dark purple sky, he had seen something beyond description.

It was like a flicker of gleaming scales.

Which meant that the theory was not completely groundless.

Also, he had heard someone call upon him from far away.

It was hardly above a whisper, a long echo of a murmur in his mind, so to speak.

Ursrook knew that the Realm of Mind was approaching him.

He had been so close to the higher realm.

Only the one who could open the gate separating the two realms could be promoted to lord.

Ursrook closed his eyes to let the wind carry the warmth of the setting sun to his back, when he heard the patterings of footsteps coming from behind him.

"Sir Ursrook, everything is ready."

As he had expected, it was his junior guard.

"Very good," Ursrook said without turning around. "Keep monitoring them."

"Yes, sir," the guard replied, who did not leave immediately but instead asked, "Are those low lives really going to do what we want them to? They should have had a glimpse of your real power now... We sacrificed a lot to set up this trap. If the Sky Lord knows..."

"Right, I understand your concern, but I believe it's worth it," Ursrook opened his eyes and looked toward the south. He could now see a black winding track stretch across the continent. Over the past six months, numerous demons had been killed in the human territories. The track continued to inch forward with incredible obstinacy. It was as if nothing could stop it.

This was the first time that human beings had been at an advantage during a battle without erecting city walls.

Ursrook knew he could have easily slaughtered the human beings in various ways if they had built the track in an area dominated by the Red Mist, however, it was extremely difficult to wipe them out on the Fertile Plains. First of all, the number of troops at his command was pretty limited. Even if the lord sent him reinforcements, the victory would cost him dear considering that the humans would have already fully established themselves on the plains.

So he must exterminate this new human army in its infancy.

"How do you feel about the war recently? Do you feel thwarted?"

The guard answered after a moment of silence, "That's because we've burned our bridge behind us."

"No, it's because our enemy dragged us into the arena to face a battle to death," Ursrook corrected him. "We've established outposts and also tried to expand the Red Mist. However, these two methods didn't work as well as 400 years ago, because human

beings now possess weapons with large shooting ranges. Whether you view them as low lives or not, it's a fact. Our every single movement is currently under the scrutinies of the witches, which is why there has been hardly any progress lately."

Ursrook broke off his speech, his right hand outstretched in the direction of the black track, and gradually balled the hand into a fist. "Nothing will change if we don't erect the Birth Tower. Therefore, I have to blind their eyes and chop off their arms before they're awakened so that they can't play their old trick, even though this means that I'll have to sacrifice two outposts!"

As Ursrook spoke, a horrible, contorted smile flutter over his face, and the air around him stirred. He knew that at the encampment at the end of the track, somebody was watching him. Perhaps, the disturbance of the magic power just now had already created a commotion over there.

"I'm at your service, sir!" The guard shouted respectfully as he sensed the immense magic power.

Ursrook did not tell the guard that he was now very close to his next upgrade.

Soon, his power would experience a significant increase.

Perhaps this upcoming battle would help him upgrade.

War was always the fastest way to improve oneself. Even the king would love to participate in a battle.

If he became a lord, the Sky Lord could no longer control him.

As for whether human beings would take the actions in the direction he desired, Ursrook was not worried at all.

He knew perfectly well men's habits

They would always come for the bait.

The sun had now completely sunk below the mountains. Darkness gradually crept over as the last drop of sun rays faded out

and left a few faint glimmers of stars strewn over the sky.

Ursrook remembered that one time he had soared into the upper air.

He had reconfirmed his desire that day.

Now, he was working toward his goal.

And human beings were possibly thinking exactly the same thing as he was now.

In this battle that would determine their fates, only the victor was entitled to the unknown realm and the Origin of Magic.

He was waiting for this upcoming final settlement with great anticipation.

# Chapter 1150: The Ambush Plan (I)

---

Just as Nightingale had suggested, Camilla collapsed mainly because of the mental strain rather than frailty and fatigue.

She completely recovered after two days, as though all that she had experienced was just a dream.

Roland was hugely relieved.

Camilla was the key to their ambush operation.

Although Camilla distanced herself from him immediately, becoming wary and alarmed again, Roland was glad to see her come back to normal.

He knew Camilla was still worried about Joan.

However, she managed to suppress her anguish, as she had something more important to worry about.

Roland decided to keep the news of Joan's disappearance from the other witches, particularly from Lightning, and only disclosed it to a very few selected witches, including Tilly, Anna and Nightingale.

He knew Joan was a member of the Neverwinter Exploration Group, of which Lightning was the leader. Currently, as the two main figures responsible for the outer defense of the First Army, Lightning and Maggie had been staying on the frontier for several months under exceptional pressure. Plus, Lightning had been hurt by the Magic Slayer, so Roland would not allow any news to disturb her state of mind.

The following week, he traveled back and forth between the Third Border City, the weapon test site and the castle boardroom, aiming to finalize their ambush plan. Since their biggest threat at the moment was the Magic Slayer much faster and also more nimble than regular Devilbeasts, it was very hard for him to develop a perfect plan to kill him.

He had thought that the plan would only take him two or three days, but he had encounter some major difficulties during mock operations. Fortunately, with the help of various parties, he had finally drafted a feasible operation plan.

The pre-operation meeting was held in the underground hall at the Third Border City a week later.

Alethea spoke first.

She turned on the magic core and projected the image of the rear of the Taquila ruins on a screen that ran across the wall for several meters, looking exactly like a window that had been opened in midair.

Nevertheless, this was not a real window where one could poke his head out of, so there was literally not much to be seen. As Alethea could not adjust the angle of the projector after the Five-Colored Stone was broken, they could not see the surroundings of the ruin. However, the "window" was facing the demons' Red Mist supply line directly, which provided them with a fairly good reference as to where to set up the ambush.

"This Red Mist supply line stretched away on the continent to the northeast and southwest, and there's a group of demons supplying the Red Mist pretty much every day on this route. Ten months ago when Lorgar found the demons and when Ashes went to locate them, this number increased to three. Using the information, we can determine how many troops our enemy has lost and how many are left. Since they only have one supply line, the Senior Demons would not deviate from this line too much when they retreat."

"Can't they build a fake Red Mist supply line?" Wendy asked apprehensively.

"As long as the demons still rely on the Red Mist to sustain themselves, this information should be reliable," Alethea explained patiently, though she had answered the same questions several times. "They did transport a large amount of the Red Mist to

mislead us once, and also used the Red Mist to attack us from a long distance. However, they've never reduced the Red Mist to deceive us, because that would be suicidal."

"It's very easy to understand," Agatha put in. "If the demons really had alternative supplies, they would have invaded the interior of Graycastle directly from the Misty Forest or the Hermes Plateau, which would definitely cause more damage than attacking from the frontier. If they have something else other than the Red Mist, they would no longer need to hold on to the Obelisk made of God's Stones."

Seeing no more objections, Alethea continued, "The demons' supply team is mainly made up of transformed Siege Beasts and several Mad Demons, which would not pose any threats to our Special Unit and the 'Seagull'. With this taken into consideration, our main target will be the Devilbeasts in the sky."

"As for the location," Alethea said as she pointed to Edith, "I agree with this mortal's judgement. She'll take over from here."

"This is a joint effort of the General Staff and the witches," the Pearl of the Northern Region said while smiling gracefully. "Also, special thanks to Miss Lightning and Miss Maggie for supplying us the map. Please take a look at the report you have. The land to the east of the Red Mist supply line is as flat as a pancake with hardly any trees, so it's not ideal for an ambush. Nonetheless, the 'Seagull' could see everything from above. The landscape to the west is much more rugged, and there's a small mountain there."

Roland flipped open the report on his desk and found the map. Compared to the high definition map drawn by Soraya, this map was apparently much simpler. Roland gathered that it was probably Lightning's work when she rode on Maggie in the sky. Although it was not accurate enough to serve as a guide for the troops and the artillery, it provided them with basic information on the rear of Taquila.



"We can more or less see the landscape on this side through the phantom instrument, so we need a map to supply the part not shown on the screen. There are three locations where Miss Andrea could shoot. One is the crest of the mountain in the north, another in the jungles in between, and the other the protruded area at the foot of the mountain in the south."

"The best location would be the crest," Roland cut in.

The so-called "mountain" was actually no more than 100 meters high, and it looked like a huge mound of earth in the distance, but this was the highest point in this area. Nothing could be more important for a sniper than a clear view. From a high point, a sniper could not only hit his target from a distance but could also spy on the enemy on the ground.

"Yes, Miss Andrea said so too," Edith agreed with a nod. "That mountain is relatively far from the Red Mist supply line. If the 'Seagull' catches up with the Magic Slayer, the Special Unit would have to travel a long way to provide supports. Also, there's no place to hide on the top of the mountain, so we'll be pretty much exposed to the Devilbeasts in the sky. If anything happens, the 'Seagull' would not be able to come to rescue at a moment's notice. The most important reason is — we can't see it through the phantom instrument."

Roland said thoughtfully, " So, do you fear... that the demons would come?"

"This is the highest point of this area. I would be extremely careful if it were me. Although Lightning says the demons haven't done any war preparation, it doesn't hurt to be cautious, since this is, after all, a war of magic. Like the way we use the Sigil of Screaming your Majesty had put at the headstream of the Redwater River, we don't necessarily need a garrison. We simply need an alert. Remember, the biggest priority for the Special Unit is to maintain its secrecy. If they're exposed, there will be no point whatsoever in setting up an ambush."

"To be honest, back in the Union age, the most difficult part was to make mortals understand magic power." Just then, Alethea's voice came to Roland's mind. From the reactions of the people on the floor, it appeared that the message was exclusive for Roland. "Mortals rarely take magic power into account and act as if they're living in a different dimension from us, but this mortal is different... Your subordinates do have quite interesting personalities."

"That's because you guys have never really taught them. Not everyone is a genius. Education is the most effective way to elevate a civilization," Roland replied casually and then turned to Edith. "So, which location did you pick?"

"In the jungle," she replied quickly. "The sniper team will have a narrow view and could hide in there easily. They could monitor the sky while at the same time supporting Princess Tilly if necessary from the jungle. Of course, they could also hide at the foot of the mountain but it's too close to the Taquila ruin. If the enemy retreats, they'll be spotted very quickly. So overall, the jungle isn't the best option but —"

"The most thoughtful one," Roland supplied Edith's answer.

Edith agreed with a smile while placing her hand on her chest, "Exactly. Two units would round on the Magic Slayer. Miss Andrea could shoot him if he isn't aware of the ambush. If he is, the God's Punishment Witches will be stopping him. Nevertheless, the whole ambush plan relies on the new weapon made by Queen Anna."

# Chapter 1151: The Ambush Plan (II)

---

Roland knew what the Pearl of the Northern Region was referring to.

He had encountered many technical difficulties during the manufacturing process of the God's Stone bullet, such as the caliber and casing. He was trying to make the God's Stone as large as possible, but large stones normally generate a large anti-magic area. Also, a large caliber weapon would inevitably be heavier than normal ones and was a lot harder to hide, transport, and use.

In the past week and after numerous tests, Anna, Agatha, Lucia, and Andrea had finally nailed the parameters of this new weapon.

To make sure that an equal force was applied to the bullet, the God's Stone of Retaliation was shaped into a cylinder with a width of 30mm coated with copper and equipped with a sharp bullet head. The bullet itself had a caliber of 35mm.

This was the only way the God's Stone inside wouldn't be crushed by the gunpowder.

The "black hole" created by the God's Stone would be around one and a half meters, which meant that the barrel of the gun should be at least two meters. Due to its huge size, the parts of the gun had to be detachable to fit in the Magic Ark.

Furthermore, as the gun would have a high recoil due to its huge caliber, a special mount would be employed when using this weapon.

Because of the above-mentioned technical difficulties, the final version of the gun was abnormally colossal. It was simply impossible for a sniper to reach the bolt and load the cartridge by himself. The gun was nearly as heavy as two grown men put together and required more than one person in the Special Unit to operate. Although the gun was equipped with a muzzle brake and a

buffer, the shooter could still sustain injuries from the recoil.

Fortunately, one good thing about this new weapon was that they only planned to use it once. With this in mind, these drawbacks became acceptable.

A large caliber also had a few advantages.

The biggest strength was a longer shooting range or, more precisely, a longer effective shooting range. A bullet would normally deviate from its original course beyond a certain point and become ineffective. However, Andrea could direct any bullets precisely to their designated landing spots. That was why this new weapon had, theoretically, a shooting range of over ten miles.

Now, Roland understood why Edith had chosen the jungle as the ambush location.

As this weapon required a much longer time to assemble and prepare before use than Ashes' gun, the operator had to take some cover to avoid the demons' scrutinies.

"Lastly is the retreat route, " Edith said as she pointed to the map. "After the battle at Taquila officially begins, the First Army will dispatch a unit to support the retreating Special Unit at five to six miles from the left. As for when we should launch the ambush, it really depends on how the demons react. That's all for the plan."

The plan, which had taken Edith a week to finalize, was soon approved. After a brief discussion, Edith nailed the members of the two teams.

The ambush team was comprised of Sylvie, Andrea, Camilla, Margie, and Ashes. The former four would mainly be responsible for the ambush while Ashes would be the general protector. Lightning would be the scout. She could transport the God's Stone bullet that Maggie could not. The God's Stone would not affect her as long as it was hung by a rope.

Otherwise, the team had to walk to the ambush area.

There were ten people in total in the Seagull team. Maggie was the scout. Apart from Tilly and Wendy, the rest of the team were all God's Punishment Witches, of whom Zoe was the leader. Roland expected to have more people on the team. However, since the big caliber gun, grenades and armor had taken too much space, Roland had to cut down the number, not to mention that Hummingbird had already reduced the weight of these supplies.

No strategies or tactics were needed for such a direct confrontation. The only thing they needed to do was to take things slow and advance step by step.

The entire operation almost exhausted their resources, which forced Roland to rethink about their transportation facilities. Currently, the First Army solely relied on the inner river and the railway to transport supplies and troops. If they had an armored cavalry, they simply needed to send the armored cavalry to cut off the demons' supplies and envelop the enemy from the rear. In that case, the Magic Slayer would be very likely cornered due to the lack of Red Mist.

At the end of the meeting, Edith rose again and shot Roland a hesitant look.

"Anything else?" Roland asked, his brows raised.

"After the final battle begins, I hope you and the City Hall could move to the Third Border City for the time being." She paused for a second and then went on, "Also, the witches in the Castle District should do so as well."

"What do you mean?" Barov, who had been wanting to interrupt, finally seized a chance to cut in. "Are you ordering His Majesty?"

A little flustered, Anna asked, "Do you think the demons will attack Neverwinter?"

"Very unlikely, but there's a possibility," Edith replied placidly. "The Red Mist supply line doesn't necessarily equal to the exact

number of the demons. For example, it could be either 3,000 demons or just 1,000 demons having an expedition. The demons have been to Neverwinter once anyway. However, this time, they aren't just going to warn us but are coming straight to the Castle District. What if they aren't Mad Demons but Senior Demons..."

There was a short strained silence.

"They won't mind abandoning Taquila?" Agatha questioned as she frowned.

"If a loss is inevitable, they won't care that much."

"I see," Roland said, smiling airily. "Let's do it. Barov, you take care of the City Hall. You know what to do, don't you?"

"Yes, of course, Your Majesty."

Indeed, even if Edith did not make the suggestion of relocating to the Third Border City, Roland was still planning to spectate the unfolding of the war in the hall. Although he could only see a small part of Taquila, this was a very rare opportunity to watch a "live" battle.

"So, everyone, I know what you're all thinking about," Roland announced as he straightened up. Beyond a doubt, everybody would devote themselves to the war that would determine their very survival on this planet after this meeting. He knew it was time for him to make a closing statement. "You're right. We're now very close to our victory. Although few people know about this war, and even fewer understand its implication, I'm sure this war will be remembered by the entire human race at one point in the future! We started preparing for it even before the Battle of Divine Will starts and have successfully kept the demons away from the Fertile Plains. Whether the demons are held up in the Sky-sea Realm or not, we'll win! I just feel sorry that I can't come with you to the front."

The hall was dead silent. Roland could see everyone was excited,

their eyes glistening.

"Beat the demons and take Taquila. I'm looking forward to this battle!" Roland shouted while laying delicate stress on each syllable as he surveyed the room.

"As you command!" everyone chorused.

# Chapter 1152: Persuasion

---

Two days later, the "Seagull" made a slow descent on the runway next to the forest terminus station.

Tilly saw Ashes waiting for her as she got off the plane.

As usual, Ashes immediately came here, although she knew this was going to be a short meeting.

Sometimes, Tilly even doubted whether Ashes had fulfilled her duties entrusted by Roland.

Yet Ashes always said to her, "Don't worry. Leaf is now in the form of the Heart of Forest, so nobody could possibly hurt her. She's always the first person to notify me of your arrival."

"How long are you going to stay here today?" Ashes asked her after the onlookers scuttled away.

"I'll be here until tomorrow morning," Tilly said heavily as she stared into Ashes' smiling eyes. She had promised Roland to persuade Ashes, but now her confidence somehow wavered. "Iron Axe and Edith came here as well. The 'Torch' project is close to its end, so there's a lot to clarify."

"So you're staying overnight..." Ashes mumbled thoughtfully. "Well in that case, let's go to the campsite first. Leaf grew some new fruit that taste really good. I'll set up a bonfire in the evening so that we could have some barbeque..."

Every time Tilly had leisure time, Ashes would instantly fill her schedule.

"Not this time. I have to do a lot of preparation work tonight and probably won't have time."

Deflated, Ashes sighed, "Alright... I see."

Tilly could not help giggling as she saw this invincible Extraordinary be subdued like a punctured balloon. She instantly



felt more self-assured. "But I'm not the person who's going to be busy. It's going to be you actually. We'll work together in the next few days, so you have to get prepared."

"Me?"

"Yes, the Special Unit needs you to intercept the demons, so you'll have to pack tonight and go to the front with me tomorrow morning. Of course, we're going to take the 'Seagull'," Tilly said smilingly. "As for Leaf, I'll ask Roland to appoint another person to take care of her."

"..." It took Ashes a while to put herself together. She complained, "You could have told me at the beginning..."

While Ignoring Ashes' protest, Tilly averted her eyes and said, "We don't have time for barbeque today, but we could still have some fruit. Do you care to take me there?"

Ashes immediately extended her hand and said, "Sure."

...

After they returned to their abode at the encampment after dinner, Tilly told Ashes the operation plan drafted by the General Staff.

Ashes seemed to have already predicted that she'll be in the sniper team. However, when Tilly mentioned about the operator of the "Seagull", her face clouded over.

"Don't tell me that you're going to operate the 'Seagull'."

After a moment of silence, Tilly looked up into her eyes and replied, "I'm the best person for this task."

"But Roland promised me that he would take care of you. He would never let you participate in the war!" Ashes flared up. "I need to talk to him —"

"He didn't agree with this arrangement."

"What?"

"Roland didn't agree on this matter," Tilly said. "I volunteered. So, how are you going to stop me? Are you going to tie me up and imprison me in the castle?"

"Er..." Ashes froze.

"Well, Roland would probably do that himself if this was a suicidal mission. But like I said, the 'Seagull' will just act as a contingency plan. Only when Andrea fails to kill the Magic Slayer will we get involved in this operation. Plus, what I need to do is simply drop the God's Punishment Witches off before the demon."

"Isn't it dangerous? This is the Magic Slayer we're talking about —"

"I knew you're going to say that," Tilly cut across her off resignedly. "Do you really think that I'll surpass the Magic Slayer and drop the God's Punishment Witches under his nose?"

"If not, then how are you going to do that?" Ashes asked, her brows furrowed. "The God's Punishment Witches can't fly. If the Magic Slayer doesn't fall for the trick, this plan won't work."

The most important task for a decoy was to convince the enemy that he had a good chance of winning. Otherwise, the Magic Slayer would retreat even faster, and the bait usually took most of the risk during an operation.

"I'm glad that Edith isn't as simple as you are," Tilly said while rolling her eyes. "The demons need the Red Mist, so they won't swagger our way as bold as brass, and we don't need to use the 'Seagull' to lure him. We simply need to cut off his supplies. The Magic Slayer will definitely recharge himself, because he won't be able to flee the plains with his tiny little gas tank. In other words, the God's Punishment Witches are awaiting the arrival of their weary visitor and dragging him into battle. So, Wendy and I will have enough time to come back safely."

Ashes lapsed into a long silence and then spoke hesitantly, "But

what if..."

Tilly shook her head and said, "I'm not saying that this plan is completely risk free, but at least the risk is under our control. I've told you that the 'Seagull' is just a part of this plan. I won't put myself in danger unless I'm as silly as you. In fact, the main reason I decided to go to the front is you. I'll never feel settled if I stay at the rear watching you fight!"

"Your Highness..." Ashes said, speechless.

"Say my name!"

"Ti — "

Before Ashes announced the word, Tilly grabbed Ashes by the collar, stretched herself up to her tiptoes, and kissed her.

Ashes felt warmth wash over her.

This was the first time that Princess Tilly had kissed her.

Then Tilly disengaged herself and looked away.

In the guttered candlelight, Ashes saw a fleeting blush on Tilly's cheeks.

"Every time you went on a trip, whether we were living on the Sleeping Island or in Neverwinter, I was always the one left behind, awaiting your return which I don't know will come in a few days or a few months. But it wasn't like this before. Back in the old king's city, we were always together. Then why do we have to part now? Weren't we also in danger when the church hunted us?"

Tilly turned around and gazed into Ashes' eyes. There was a twinge of starchiness in her voice. "I don't want to wait anymore."

From the steely gray eyes, Ashes knew that Tilly had made up her mind.

"I see, but on one condition," Ashes sighed deeply. She knew the Wimbledons were notorious for their temerity.

"I know what you're going to say. Don't force yourself. Make safety your top priority. Roland told me all that... Well, I know what I'm doing. This is all common sense..."

"That's not what I was going to say."

"Huh?" Tilly gaped.

"One more time. This is my condition."

With these words, Ashes pulled Princess Tilly into a hug and lowered her head.

# Chapter 1153: A Real Monster

---

The following morning, at Tower Station No. 9.

The officers and commanders, after working for more than a week, finally returned to the headquarters at the frontier.

However, Tower Station No. 9 was, technically, not the real frontier now.

Agatha noticed from the map that the railway was now just 15 kilometers away from the ruins of Taquila, and the area within a radius of five kilometers had all been converted to the green "safety zone". The biggest change this week, however, lay in the area three kilometers from the ruin, which was an alarming red color.

"You're finally here," Morning Light, Ferlin Eltek, said as he trotted up to them and administered a perfect military salute.

The army and the rest of the General Staff all rose to their feet and saluted as well, excited and relieved to see their commanders come back.

Agatha was also put at ease when she saw the smiling looks on her coworkers' faces. This meant that the newly-developed red area did not really impact the entire "Torch" plan.

"Well done, everyone. You all did a good job," Iron Axe praised while nodding in satisfaction as he tapped the map. "Ferlin, did the demons send their reinforcements?"

"No, sir," Morning Light replied. "Those are ditches dug by the demons."

"Ditches?"

"Miss Sylvie saw them first. Some demons crept out from underneath the Red-Mist-enveloped ground and started to dig the ditches six days ago. Then Miss Lightning confirmed Miss Sylvie's

story and marked the area as dangerous."

Iron Axe, Edith and, Agatha exchanged looks and asked, "Are they trenches?"

"We think so too, because, according to Lightning's map, those ditches, although pretty crude, are very similar to the First Army's trenches. The horizontal ones are three to 100 feet apart and connected to several vertical ones," Ferlin explained as he unfolded a crude drawing in front of them. "The biggest difference is that the demons dug more vertical ditches for retreating purposes, and these ditches almost level, with a differential of less than two meters, so they look tidier than ours."

"They're learning from us," Agatha muttered, unable to help herself.

If what they had heard about the first Battle of Divine Will was true, then it was the second time that the demons had learned from human beings.

"Very interesting," Edith said after she studied the drawing. "Those vertical ditches aren't for retreating. They're for attacking purposes instead."

"Yes," Iron Axe agreed. "The trenches can somewhat block shells, but they can't block the Longsong Cannons. A few trenches won't change anything. The only way for them to change their situation is to attack the First Army."

"That's why they make the vertical ditches so close to us?" Ferlin said with a look of comprehension. "That does save a lot of time when the trenches are so packed like this."

"So, what are we going to do?" Agatha asked.

"Nothing," the Pearl of the Northern Region sneered. "When they're within the shooting range of the cannons, ask the 'Blackriver' to fire. Although it's like putting fine timber to petty use, His Majesty has provided tons of ammunition for us to use in

this final battle. I dare them to run right into us against the artillery fire."

Iron Axe turned to Ferlin and asked, "How's the railway construction going?"

"The demons fought back but didn't cause much damage," Ferlin reported. "The Mad Demons know that they can't approach the encampment, so they rarely come close to us. It was mostly the Devilbeasts. However, only 10 to 15 Devilbeasts come at a time, so I guess there aren't many Devilbeasts left in Taquila now. We could have detained more Devilbeasts if the Senior Demon didn't get in our way."

"Did the Magic Slayer come?" Agatha asked as her brows drew together.

"More than once," Ferlin confirmed and nodded. "The battles unfolded pretty much the same way every time. The anti-aircraft machine gun squad first fired at the Magic Slayer, and then the Devilbeasts joined the battle." Ferlin's face turned one shade darker. "Every time I saw him, I felt... I was fighting a real monster."

"What do you mean?" Edith asked in curiosity.

"He always appeared where we were most unguarded. Then we would go into a sort of trance the moment he landed. Now, it should be noted that the soldiers were all wearing a God's Stone of Retaliation at that time," Ferlin said slowly. "If we didn't have a God's Stone to protect us — for instance, those who hid in a bunker, too curious for their own good — we would have panicked outright. The closer we are to the Magic Slayer, the more susceptible we'll be to his influence. When the encampment sank into complete chaos, the Devilbeasts in the sky would dive and attack. Although Sylvie would always notify us beforehand, it's not easy to stop a plummeting Magic Slayer that can't be killed with just one or two shots. The best we've done so far was break one of

his arms."

"It looks like that he isn't always lucky," the Pearl of the Northern Region said with a faint smile.

"But the thing is, when he showed up a few days later, his broken arm was healed as if nothing had happened," Ferlin said with a bitter smile. "Well, the demons may have a special treating method as we have Miss Nana, but..."

"But what?" Iron Axe pursued heavily.

"Many soldiers reported to the General Staff that the Magic Slayer becomes increasingly sneaky. It's like he has gradually got the hang of the battle. Before, one machine gun would be enough to block him, but now, we need two or three squads. If we didn't have the God's Stones of Retaliation and the weapons created by His Majesty, he would have... killed all of us just by himself."

"They were like that in the Union age," Agatha said through her teeth. "As long as they're alive, they'll get upgraded in the next battle."

"As long as they're... alive?"

"Senior Demons upgrade through battles. The more severe their injuries are, the more powerful they'll become next time in terms of magic power and combat techniques. They've killed many Extraordinaries. In a way, we helped them improve," the Ice Witch said as she closed her eyes. "Nevertheless, not every demon survived their injuries. He must have some special abilities to heal himself!"

"Are you saying... that he's a Senior Demon with both the cursing power and a self-repairing ability?" Iron Axe asked tersely.

"Very likely," Agatha said resolutely with a hint of steel in her eyes. "Ferlin's right. This is a real monster. If we let him go, we'll have great trouble in the future. So, we must destroy him in this ruined Holy City!"



# Chapter 1154: A Repeated Fate

---

Agatha, Iron Axe, and Edith departed for the front by train after they disclosed the operation plan finalized in Neverwinter.

The double-track railway had now forked out into four branches for both operation and transportation purposes, with exactly the same setting as the various stations. There would be much more work for the construction team, but headquarters understood that the terminus station, Tower Station No. 10, would probably not come into use for the final battle.

The commanders knew that once the construction of all the stations were completed, there was nothing the demons could do to turn the table. First of all, it was extremely hard to destroy the "Blackriver" made of steel. Even in the event of a disruption of the transportation system, the army could still sustain themselves with the military supplies at each station while the railroad was amended. Given such circumstances, the demons could no longer defeat human beings by cutting off the supplies, and they certainly could not directly clash with the fortified stations and their firearms. The only way left for the demons was to stop the First Army before the completion of Tower Station No. 10.

In other words, the decisive battle would break out at any time rather than on a specific date.

The railway was now strictly protected by various bunkers, trenches, and fortresses.

Also, as Agatha had noticed, the railroad facing the Holy City had turned at a small angle, which enabled the train to parallel Taquila. Roland suggested that this was the optimal firing angle for the train-mounted guns.

The two armored trains, the "Blackrivers" were now standing magnificently at the end of the railway.

Like two moving fortresses, the armored trains were equipped with four revolving gun turrets that would instantly fire when the demons attempted to approach the railway. The 152mm-caliber Longsong Cannon mounted on the top was pointing at the sky in the direction of the Taquila city.

As Agatha ascended the lookout tower at the center of the encampment, she saw the city ruin half-buried in the thick, dense bushes around it.

Forlorn ran through her when she saw the dilapidated city lay woefully below her.

Even though it had been over 400 years, she could still make out the faint outline of the old Holy City from this desolate relic.

"Were you born there?" Edith asked.

Agatha nodded. The memories of the past flooded back to her.

"Congratulations. From today onwards, you're officially a member of the Union."

"You're really the youngest High Awakened in the history of time. Welcome to the Quest Society."

"Wow, you're so amazing!"

...

"Do you know what you're doing? They're all valiant soldiers who devoted everything to the Union. They're just in a coma, and you want to conduct tests on them?"

"You know how slim the chance is for them to wake up. They sustained head injuries! I'm sure they'll prefer offering their bodies to dying in their sleep."

"I can't accept it."

"This is an order signed by Lady Alice. If you can't accept it, then you're free to leave."

...

"Your ladyship, the city is breached. I'm afraid the allied forces couldn't hold up any longer! Let's get out of here!"

"But my sister hasn't come back yet."

"She's a member of the Defending Army and she'll never abandon her post. If you end up dying here, she sacrificed herself for nothing!"

...

"Now, run for your life!"

"But... your ladyship, where can we go? Taquila is gone."

"Never give up. There's still a hope! Climb over the mountain, cross the river, and head to the Barbarian Land... Go re-establish the order!"

...

"Why did you stay? You've still got a chance to live if you leave now."

"I don't have magic, but I know that it's my duty to protect you."

...

"Your Majesty, she's awake."

As the miserable past floated out of her memories, Agatha felt as though she had lived her old life once again.

Agatha had been an outcast in the Union. Although people called her a genius, she had been marginalized by the other witches in the Union due to her attitude toward common people. She had later been further renounced by the Quest Society because of her objection to the God's Punishment Army plan and forced to conduct experiments in secret in the Misty Forest.

Nevertheless, Agatha still deeply loved Taquila.

It was the last human city that had witnessed numerous heroic

moments. Thousands of witches and common people had been killed during the battle against the demons, one of whom was her sister, who had taken her perpetual rest beneath one of the fallen city walls.

Agatha, however, did not feel much comfort in her survival. Instead, she felt a surge of heavy guilt weigh down upon her.

Every time she closed her eyes, she heard her dying companions call for help.

Agatha tried to convince herself that she was not a deserter. She survived to avenge her sisters and retrieve the land that had once belonged to the human race.

It was her relentless belief in the God's Punishment Witches that kept her moving forward.

She was living for them.

Two giant skeletons loomed through the ruin. They were the demons' new weapons and also the start of her nightmare.

Agatha looked toward Iron Axe and said, "I have a request."

"Yes," Iron Axe replied while nodding.

"If the First Army could move ten more kilometers toward Taquila, I hope the God's Punishment Witches and I could fire first."

Nothing but thunder and flame could end her nightmare. The roars of the cannons would raze the ruin of the Holy City to the ground, and the relic, along with the remains of her fellow witches, would once again return to the Fertile Plains.

But Taquila would be reborn from the ashes.

...

In the evening of the third day, Sylvie noticed the demons' movements when the construction team managed to extend the railway to around 12 kilometers from Taquila.

A large number of Mad Demons crept out of the Red-Mist-corrupted ground underneath the giant skeletons and swarmed toward their trenches. Then two enormous "shadows" materialized in front of the ramshackle city wall and ambled over to the encampment.

Sylvie immediately realized that they were two huge God's Stones of Retaliation very similar to the God's Stones of Punishment Pillar in the battle at the North Slope. These two humangous stones were as large as some raw ores in the mines and cast a 150-meter-long shadow on the ground, which completely blocked the vision of the Magic Eye.

Instantly, two blind zones in the scouting area were created.

No matter what the demons' intention was, Sylvie knew this must be a desperate struggle from the enemy, as they had dispatched over 1,000 Mad Demons at a time.

This was unquestionably a sign of the final battle.

Sylvie called the underground headquarters at once.

A few seconds later, a shrill, piercing alarm cracked like a whip through the air above the encampment!

# Chapter 1155: The Battle of Taquila (I)

---

As the alarm went off, the soldiers at the frontier immediately entered the state of high alert according to their contingency plan.

"Hurry up! Drop what you're working on and go to the exit closest to you!" The soldiers responsible for evacuating the encampment yelled as they directed the construction team to the shelters. "Don't push and don't look around! Remember, no matter what happens outside, don't leave the shelter!"

"Shelter No. 6 is full!"

"Same here in Shelter No. 7!"

"Get going. Go to the next shelter. Don't block the passage. All of you, move!"

This was not the first time that they had to evacuate the railway stations. Although the air was filled with the exasperated, short-tempered hollers of the soldiers, nobody was panicking.

Around 2,000 workers ebbed away into the underground bunkers through the exit passages. These bunkers at the rear of the encampment, all built by Lotus, were plastered with steel plates. They could not only provide the soldiers accommodation but could also shield them from spears and machine guns. Even if the outer ring of the defensive line was broken through, the shelters would still remain safe.

After the tidal waves of people receded, darkness soon closed in upon the construction site which had been alive with flickers of light just a moment ago.

"The evacuation is completed. Lights are all off. The First Army is now filing into the encampment," Sylvie informed the other units while casting a quick glance at the surroundings. The observation room above the headquarters was currently the busiest place of the frontier. A dozen telephones lining the table rang continuously. As

there were so many messages, the staff only forwarded the most important ones to Sylvie.

Meanwhile, the officers collected information and translated it onto the map to provide references for the headquarters staff.

Sylvie, as the "eye" of the army, had now become the central information hub of the observation room that facilitated the efficient operation of the First Army.

"OK, I see. Miss Sylvie, this is Van'er from the artillery battalion. I hope you could provide us with the demons' location and firing parameters."

"Same request from the 'Blackriver I' and 'Blackriver II'!"

"Hold on a second," said Sylvie as she swept a glance to the front. The "shadows", which were slowly edging toward the army, had just entered the shooting range of 10 miles away from the encampment. Based on their current rate, it might be another five to six hours before they reached their final destination. Therefore, the most pressing issue at present was to learn the operation intention of the demons. What were they plotting and why did they create the blind zones with the God's Stones of Retaliation?

When magic power ceased to work, they had to resort to human eyes for observation.

She picked up the Sigil of Listening and asked, "Lightning, Maggie, can you hear me? Where are you?"

"We just took off. Maggie is above me." Soon, a voice came from the other end of the line, mingled with the shrill alarm. "What happened? Did the demons attack us?"

"It looks like it, but the demons obscured the majority of my vision. I reckon they've used giant God's Stones of Retaliation again."

"Noted. I'll go take a look."

"Leave it to us, coo!"

Compared to what Sylvie saw in the observation room, Lightning viewed the battlefield as something completely different.

She saw firelights gradually shrink as the night pressed on. The distant land was engulfed by a velvety darkness and looked both serene and unfathomable.

The Fertile Plains was still deep in its slumber, without noticing, in the slightest, the upcoming war.

It was almost unbelievable that the demons had already taken actions had Sylvie not warned them.

"Maggie, turn on night mode!"

"Coo, coo, coo!"

The white pigeon immediately expanded, and her body turned into a furry ball. A massive head poked out of the gigantic sphere with two large, glassy eyes that were about to burst out from their sockets.

"Transformation complete. I'm now in the form of an owl, coo!"

"Then, let's go — "

Lightning steadied the "giant owl" perched on her head and flew toward the northeast.

However, Sylvie's voice came out of the Sigil of Listening in a rush as they neared Taquila. "Come back, you guys! The Magic Slayer is coming!"

Lightning shuddered as terror paralyzed her limbs. She managed to suppress her fear before replying with gritted teeth, "Even if he's coming for us, he won't find us that fast. Plus... if we go back now, we won't be able to know what the demons are hiding behind the God's Stones, right?"

"But..."



"Don't worry. He can't get me with just a Stone of Flight. As long as I avoid the anti-magic area, I'll be safe."

Lightning clenched her fists. Her hands started to sweat, but she knew she could not run away from the battle anymore. Over the past half a year, she had slowly come to realize that she would never become a brave person like the God's Punishment Witches. Even that train conductor had more guts than she did.

Nevertheless, she was not fighting the enemy all alone. She knew Maggie, Lorgar, Joan, and many other friends had her back. They had helped her to overcome her fear and start all over again.

Gradually, she had recovered her power. After what seemed to be a long and arduous journey, she had finally returned where she had fallen half a year ago.

Now, she only needed to overcome two more obstacles.

One was to fly past the Magic Slayer, and the other was to...

Strike back as a retaliation!

"Maggie, I'll leave him to you," Lightning unbuttoned her flight suit, stuffed the owl down the front, only leaving its head poking out of the collar, and then accelerated. She could definitely manage to fly at the speed of sound for ten kilometers.

"Be... be careful, the Magic Slayer... s-saw you..." Sylvie's voice came out from the sigil inarticulately as the reception went in and out because of the synchronization of magic power.

Lightning knew that she had exposed her trait. The Magic Slayer could definitely hear the popping and crackling sounds of her passing through the sound barrier.

But she was faster than sound, which meant by the time the Magic Slayer heard her, she was already way ahead of him.

A few seconds later, Maggie spied the Magic Slayer.

"That monster is at your front right, cool!"

Before Lightning could see the Magic Slayer in the dismal moonlight, a haze of black light suddenly overcast the sky!

Without a doubt, the Magic Slayer could see better in the darkness than Maggie. He had not only spotted her but also tried to cut her off. Upon realizing Lightning was way faster than him, he generated the anti-magic area.

Lightning instantly raised her speed to its maximum and started to dive.

For a split second, Lightning felt the grimy and chilly black haze brush past her ankles. The next moment, she had shaken the Magic Slayer off. As she was no longer threatened by the anti-magic area, she straightened up and zoomed across the demons' encampment. The whole encampment then slid into her view.

At the moonlit encampment, Lightning saw the demons were pushing two large God's stone cylinders forward. Like two gigantic bell towers on their sides, the pillars were at least 20 meters long and three meters tall. Behind each pillar were seven or eight neatly lined Spider Demons which were hobbling slowly in the direction of the First Army.

Right behind the Spider Demons were tons of Mad Demons, which were apparently using the pillars as some sort of mobile bunkers.

## Chapter 1156: The Battle of Taquila (II)

---

After Lightning crossed the encampment, she climbed higher and paused in midair.

"What's the matter, coo?" Maggie asked while raising her head.

Lightning did not answer but turned around and peered down at Taquila. The visibility of this impenetrable blackness was less than 200 meters, and it was a rather hopeless attempt to look for the Magic Slayer under this condition.

But that did not matter.

Lightning knew the Magic Slayer could see her.

Her back was currently facing the moon, so the Magic Slayer would instantly spot her when he stared up.

Nevertheless, he did not come after her.

He knew he could not catch up.

So, he decided to let her go.

In a way, she won!

Lightning took a deep breath, outstretched her right hand with her finger tips still trembling, but she mustered her courage and gave him the finger.

That was the gesture Roland had taught her — a gesture of victory!

Then she whipped around, headed to the First Army's encampment without casting one last backward glance, and told Sylvie everything she had seen.

"A neatly-cut cylinder made of God's Stones of Retaliation? Noted," Sylvie said as she wrote down the approximate size of the pillars and then handed the sheet of paper to Agatha, who quickly figured out the exact location and shape based on the size of the

God's Stones. The data was soon transmitted to the observation room.

Although there might be errors in this calculation, at least they had something to rely on now. Sylvie thus made a rough estimate of the location of the pillars and called the Artillery Battalion.

A moment later, there was an earsplitting roar from the Longsong Cannons at the encampment.

Firelights erupted from the muzzle and flitted across the sky like fireflies and pierced the darkness.

As more cannons joined the battle, the encampment became vaguely visible. Sometimes shells streaked in the air like plummeting comets and left long tails behind them.

A long echo of the explosions rent the air and awoke the Fertile Plains from its deep sleep.

"So beautiful, coo..." Maggie mumbled as she stared at the artillery encampment in a daze.

Lightning stood against the wind with her hands clenching into fists.

Now, there was only one more obstacle to overcome.

...

Ursrook hovered in the air and watched mounds of earth rise and fall with an air of detachment. This was the most powerful weapon human beings had invented so far. One projectile could kill a dozen junior demons instantly without even physically contacting them. The iron shards ejected by those projectiles could penetrate armor and sink into flesh even from dozens of meters away.

Even for him, he was not completely sure whether he would survive a direct blow.

In the report submitted to the Sky Lord, he called this weapon "fiery rain".

Apart from that, human beings had also invented individual weapons such as "fire bolt" and "fire fork". Apparently, the evolution of the human race largely relied on fire. The lord believed this was a kind of upgrade, but he was more inclined to viewing such progress as a coincidence. Witches obviously possessed more diverse abilities than common people. Perhaps a singular witch, whose ability was fire control, had finally awakened after several hundred years and helped the human population to master this natural element.

However, even if human beings developed in a direction he did not wish to see, it did not mean there was nothing he could do about it. He could create boulders out of God's Stones to block the fiery rain. Ursrook noticed that God's Stones seemed to be impervious to the impact of explosions. When these projectiles brushed past the stone pillars, they bounced off, without leaving the slightest trace on the pillars.

The real danger lay in the fiery rain that penetrated the pillars and reached the symbiotic demons inside. Their impenetrable armor appeared to be impotent under the attack of the fiery rain and was instantly cracked and collapsed in one blow.

Ironically, the king seemed to have great faith in those pillars that could not feel pain and believed that it was the most epochal breakthrough their kind had obtained so far from the "legacy shards". The stone pillars not only provided far more supplies to the front but also more strategic options. The king believed that 100 such pillars would be sufficient to annihilate the entire human race.

Therefore, 100 pillars was exactly what the lord had given him.

Nonetheless, over the past half a year, not only did he fail to exterminate the human race but their grip on Taquila seemed to have loosened as well. Less than 40% of the pillars were now left at Ursrook's disposal.

If the Sky Lord had not so blindly trusted the king, Ursrook would not have found himself in such a disgusting dilemma.

If those stone pillars were destroyed halfway, he would have nothing but junior demons to fight the enemy.

That would be almost like suicide. Even the stone pillars would break upon the tremendous force of the fiery rain, let alone those unarmored junior demons.

However, Ursrook did not care.

All these sacrifices were for the final victory.

And human beings would have to pay for them.

...

At 10:00 at night in the underground headquarters.

The battle had lasted for three hours. Every five minutes, Iron Axe heard a magnificent crash coming from above that was followed by a cloud of dust showering down from the ceiling.

He heard no sounds other than the roaring cannons from the encampment. It was as though the demons were not participating in this battle at all.

This was so unusual compared to the previous battles he had partaken.

To save ammunition and preserve the cannons, Iron Axe had asked the Artillery Battalion to refrain themselves from shooting too frequently but to aim at the area exclusively behind the black shadow. The problem was that they were unable to see whether the attack was effective through the Magic Eye.

The only thing he could confirm at the moment was that the 152-caliber Longsong Cannons could not destroy the God's Stone of Punishment Pillars. Although the hailing shells significantly slowed down the stone pillars, Iron Axe knew those pillars would eventually recover. He wondered how the Spider Demons mobilize

such gigantic monsters.

"Damn it," Iron Axe snapped irritably as he punched the table. "If this occurred during the day, those monsters wouldn't stand a chance!"

The biggest problem for the First Army now was that they did not know where their shells landed, which meant that the soldiers were aiming blankly at the blind zones that stretched around 150 meters, with no feedback to rely on to correct their firing angles.

According to Sylvie, the Magic Slayer was hovering outside the encampment, apparently on the alert for Lightning. Although Lightning was fast, it was essentially very energy-consuming and also dangerous to fly at such a high speed while at the same time infiltrating the demons' encampment to provide information on the landing spots for the First Army.

Yet the soldiers must have some feedback to continue with the operation.

If such information was not provided in a timely manner, they would find it hard to effectively kill the demons.

Of course, the First Army could have directed all the shells to the blind zones to keep the demons at bay. However, if the demons chose to retreat, all their ammunition would be wasted.

Furthermore, it appeared that several Mad Demons that flanked the blind zones and attempted to launch a pincer attack. They were clearly visible to the soldiers, but Iron Axe felt reluctant to waste the ammunition on just a few demons.

"That was why the demons chose to fight at night," Edith said serenely. "This is actually better than I thought. Thanks to Sylvie, we can at least see the enemy in the darkness. Why do you look so restless? It's the demons who should worry."

"I just don't want to waste the ammunition that took us so long to produce," Iron Axe grumbled while frowning.

"Don't worry. They can't go on like that forever. I think the demons know that as well. They'll probably fight back once they are within shooting range of the mortars," the Pearl of the Northern Region said while curling up her lips. "Unfortunately for the demons, they don't know that things will soon change. The moment they enter the shooting range of the flares, we'll have a clear winner of this battle."



# Chapter 1157: The Battle of Taquila (III)

---

When the two stone pillars crossed the median and were five miles from the encampment, the First Army launched the Detection Balloons and stopped firing.

The Magic Slayer also noticed the change but he could not figure out the intention behind this movement. He knew that the balloons must be used for scouting purposes, but he did not understand how that was supposed to work when it was pitch dark on the battlefield.

When the fiery rain finally stopped, the Magic Slayer instructed his army to accelerate.

After the stone pillars were within four kilometers of the encampment, the Artillery Battalion loaded the cannons and prepared the flare projectiles.

After the first night raid, Roland had instructed the workers in Neverwinter to produce some rudimentary illumination devices. These illumination devices were essentially the same as mortars, except that there was a miniscule parachute attached to the tail of the shell and the gunpowder at the front end was replaced with a mixture of powdered magnesium and aluminium that could burn for a long time. Roland had intended to use the same projectile used to eject mortars to project flares. However, during the test, he had noticed that small-caliber bullets were neither bright enough nor had a great lasting power. Therefore, he had decided to use large-caliber shells instead. Although those shells were still not as bright as sunlight, they were sufficient enough to illuminate the battlefield.

It was actually the First Army's first time using flares in a real battle, which was obviously another suggestion from the General Staff.

When the demons were only three kilometers away from the

encampment, Iron Axe ordered the soldiers to fire.

"Yes!" Van'er hung up the phone and shouted, "Shoot flares at the largest firing angle. Ready, go!"

A few explosions filled the air, and soon dazzling orange light dispelled the darkness that had weighed heavily upon the battlefield.

Then more flares rose into the air, ignited, and plunged downward.

Like numerous tiny suns, these flares spilled light across the area within a radius of three kilometers and outshone the moon and stars strewn across the sky.

Now, the soldiers saw the giant stone pillars, the Spider Demons, and the Mad Demons that were once hidden in the darkness!

Even though the flares only illuminated a small area, it was enough for the soldiers to find their targets.

Shells streaked toward the demons behind the stone pillars. It was like the shells knew where they were going! For a split second, the demons were rooted to the ground in shock.

Within the blink of an eye, the demons' encampment erupted in deafening explosions.

...

Ursrook gazed at the "light balls" drifting down from the sky. His expression finally changed.

Now he understood why the humans launched the balloons.

They were no longer flustered and defenseless like they had been six months ago during that night raid as they had learned how to cope with a night battle. The fact that they waited for this moment to implement their new tactic told Ursrook that human beings were no longer the low lives that they used to treat with contempt.

Ursrook, for the first time, realized that human beings can rival

them.

He must inform the king of this new development!

This was the decision he made at that moment.

At the same time, Ursrook further confirmed his belief that he must exterminate this army at once and leave it no chance to disrupt their development plan.

He rested his eyes back on the battlefield. Through the fiery rain, he saw a huge gap between his army and the stone pillars that were supposed to be within their shooting range. The junior demons, which were supposed to close in from either side of the encampment, had fallen far behind and failed to provide quick assistance to those pillar-shaped symbiosis.

Apparently, the junior demons were thwarted by the fiery rain. Instead of shielding them from shells, the lit blind zones had become a narrow death zone for the demons.

Was he supposed to destroy those light balls? No... human beings could produce as many of these light balls as they wanted. Plus, he was being watched.

Ursrook accelerated abruptly and tore toward the human encampment!

He dodged a series of fire bolts darting toward him, skidded to a halt in front of a balloon suspending in midair, and grabbed the lookout in the basket by the neck before the latter could escape.

Ursrook's face split into a nasty, contorted smile as he stared down at the horror-struck man. Then he ripped the man apart.

He dropped the body and uttered a sharp, piercing wail.

That was the order to launch the general attack.

Encouraged by Ursrook's power, the junior demons below growled as they came out of hiding and swarmed toward the human encampment.

The entire battlefield was stirred!

...

The First Army had totally controlled the pace of the battle.

The flares in the air lit the area within a radius of three kilometers. As the demons emerged from behind the blind zones, both the mortars and heavy machine guns produced earth-shattering roars.

Since both parties understood that this was the final settlement between the two races, the battle became the fiercest and bitterest they had ever experienced. The Fertile Plains was thus turned into a sort of butcher house as the two powers clashed.

The Mad Demons continuously sent out spears until their arms gave away. Many of them crawled across the battlefield and left a long trail of blue blood as they were indifferent about their broken legs and penetrated torsos.

The same applied to the First Army.

Bullets rained down. Wounded soldiers were soon replaced by new ones. It appeared that nobody cared about the pelting stone needles from the Spider Demons anymore. The only time they ceased to fight was when they reloaded their guns.

This ferocious battle lasted from midnight to dawn.

When the first faint hint of sunlight was visible in the east, dozens of Devilbeasts joined the battle.

This was evidently the demons' last struggle.

The machine gun squads raised their guns and collaborated with the anti-aircraft squads to defend against the demons.

The Magic Slayer rushed into the encampment and attempted to stop the soldiers from firing, but was repulsed by a rain of shells.

It appeared that human beings were now very close to their victory.

By noon, the roars of the guns had stopped.

Agatha and Iron Axe stepped out of the underground headquarters and strolled to the frontier.

The air was impregnated with the pungent smell of gunpowder, but Agatha, for some reason, liked it.

The demons' bodies littered the ravaged meadow that had been, at one point, green and thick.

Their blood trickled down to the ground and soaked the earth. A sheen of ghostly blue light glazed off the bushes and grass the demons had once trodden on.

The Giant Skeletons in Taquila were still standing erect in the distance, but Agatha knew after this battle, the demons could no longer impede the progress of human beings. Men would soon recapture the Holy City.

"We won!" Somebody broke the silence. Agatha did not know whether it was a soldier, a witch, or one of the Taquila survivors. However, this did not matter anymore, because, in the next moment, the encampment erupted into a loud wave of cheers.

This was a victory that belonged to the entire human race!

# Chapter 1158: The Defeat

---

The celebration did not last long, and all the soldiers soon resumed their work.

The First Army immediately attended to some of the most pressing matters such as treating the wounded, making a statistic report on casualties, mending the railway, and cleaning up the battlefield.

The headquarters knew very well that the victory of this battle did not mark the end of the "Torch" project by any means. Although it now seemed certain that they would recover Taquila and that the demons were very unlikely to renew their effort after this failure, they could never let their guard down. This war would keep going until humans permanently eliminated the Magic Slayer who was now still at large.

Mankind had to leave their jubilant celebration until the final moment when they erected the Graycastle flag at the top of the ruin and when the army safely returned to Neverwinter.

After a heated discussion, the executives at the front reached a mutual understanding that there should be less than 500 demons left in the ruin of the Holy City after this battle, which implied that the demons no longer posed a threat to the First Army.

Their focus should now shift from the construction of Tower Station No. 10 to the ambush operation that specifically targetted the Magic Slayer, as the First Army currently did not need Sylvie to maintain constant vigilance against raids from the demons.

To avoid any new complications concerning this battle, the First Army resumed the bombardment the next day.

As shells showered down, the demons had no choice but to slowly retreat from their trenches to the ruins of Taquila.

In the end, only the Magic Slayer managed to stay close to the

defensive line. Nevertheless, as their main target, he could now barely approach the encampment and certainly could not stop the First Army from advancing.

After several fruitless attempts, the Magic Slayer gradually stopped showing up.

On the fourth day of the war, the railroad was finally within shooting range at 10 kilometers.

Agatha, Phyllis, and the other hundred witches were waiting to fire the Longsong Cannons as Iron Axe had instructed.

As the number of the cannons was very limited, Van'er, the commander of the artillery battalion decided to tie the fuses together with ropes so that the witches could fire at the same time.

Every single God's Punishment Witch, born in Taquila, were determined to avenge their fellow companions and rebuild the Holy City. They understood that this was going to be a historical moment that would become a part of human history, although they might not necessarily survive this Battle of Divine Will.

"I have to apologize to you," Phyllis said to Agatha softly as she held the ropes, "400 years ago, I thought it would be a disaster to entrust important tasks to mortals and more than one time, I laughed at you behind your back."

"Yes, many people thought like you back then," the Ice Witch replied smilingly. "And how do you feel about it now?"

"Now..." Phyllis said thoughtfully while curling up her lips. "It's actually not too bad to fight along side mortals."

"Ready — Go!" Just at that moment, Van'er raised his flag.

Everybody pulled the fuses back toward them, and soon thunderous roars reverberated across the encampment. A dozen shells rose, hurtled across the field, and pelted down at the Holy City.

Shockwaves rippled as the explosions took place, swept over the relic of this old city that had witnessed the past 400 years, and blasted the demons hiding in it to smithereens.

...

"It has started," Sylvie muttered.

"Yes," Andrea said indifferently, who could feel the ground quivering even at seven or eight kilometers from Taquila.

It was hard to imagine what suffering the demons had gone through after being continuously bombarded by the Longsong Cannons for a night.

"It has been five days now, right?" Margie grumbled. "Will the Magic Slayer come today?"

"Who knows?" Ashes said, shrugging.

"I want to have hot pot and potstickers in Neverwinter."

"Grrr..."

Somebody's stomach groaned in mild protest as soon as Margie finished talking.

"Well, I'll be also happy to have roast meat and ice cream bread... Aw..."

Ashes thrust some rations into Margie's mouth and said, "Have some rations if you feel hungry. Although it doesn't taste very good, it will, at least, fill you up."

"And please don't forget that we're still on a mission," Camilla Dary added. "You can think about food as much as you like when you're back to Neverwinter. Now, concentrate and get your job done."

"She was tempted, too. She just never understands jokes," Andrea thought to herself while shaking her head, and then rested her eyes back on Taquila.



As the First Army started to strike back, the Special Unit also, as planned, left the encampment, went around the ruin, and crouched down in the jungle to the west of the Red Mist supply line. Since they did not know when the Magic Slayer would retreat, they had to wait in ambush and wait.

The witches were used to living in a harsh environment. To avoid unwelcome attention from the Devilbeasts lurking in the sky, they neither pitched tents nor made a fire. Everyone wrapped themselves up in a thick blanket and spent the night in trees. As for food, they ate wheat cakes to sustain themselves.

Andrea suddenly started to miss the life in Neverwinter. To be honest, when she had moved to Neverwinter with Tilly, she had thought the so-called "home for witches" was just another empty promise made by the ruler, another city in which they were going to take refuge just temporarily. She had been determined to leave with Tilly if the latter decided to relocate again. However, now she was not so sure whether she would stick to her original plan.

In Neverwinter, she slept in a soft bed and had the liberty to try numerous delicacies. There was a constant supply of hot and cold water for a bath, as well as an excellent heating system that allowed her to walk barefoot in winter. She had never lived so comfortably even when had been a noble. Such a leisure lifestyle had nothing to do with extravagance or self-indulgence but was more of a refined and sophisticated culture. Andrea knew Neverwinter had pretty much won her over.

Fortunately, Roland and Tilly got along well at the moment, so she did not need to make a decision anytime soon.

Andrea thought she should request a huge reward from Roland after this mission was over.

Ideally, she hoped the Magic Slayer would stick to Taquila and be blasted into pieces by the cannons. If the Magic Slayer chose to flee, Andrea would then hope she could kill him with one shot of

the God's Stone bullet. The worst scenario would be that the Magic Slayer noticed their ambush and zigzagged across the field to dodge their bullets, in which case, they had to resort to their last solution: the "Seagull".

Andrea did not really think that the Magic Slayer would be blasted to pieces or successfully killed in the ambush. Over the past five days during the night battle, the Magic Slayer had kept changing his position above Taquila, which made it extremely hard for her to take the aim. Andrea was not sure whether this was a pure coincidence or that the Magic Slayer was deliberately avoiding her.

"Awwwwwww — "

Suddenly, there was a piercing scream that filled the air.

"What happened?" Ashes asked.

"One shell hit the Giant Skeleton!" Sylvie exclaimed. "There's a big hole in the back of the Skeleton. Goodness, that thing... is howling!"

"It can actually feel pain! I didn't expect it to be a living being."

"Red Mist came out of its wound like it's bleeding," Sylvie said while gazing upon the southeast. "The Magic Slayer is charging at us too."

"I wish someone could just shoot him down," Andrea said while spreading out her hands.

"Hang on... No, the Magic Slayer turned around halfway!" Sylvie corrected herself, frowning. "What's going on? The Skeletons are retreating as well. Some demons are attempting to stop them and are being stomped to death. They've lost control..."

After a long silence, Sylvie asked tentatively, "Are the demons killing each other?"

Andrea and Ashes exchanged looks. This was a sign of an utter

rout in every way. Did the demons finally break down and lose their morale as they were unable to continue to fight under pressure?"

Their suspicion was soon confirmed by Sylvie.

"The Magic Slayer has fled Taquila!"

# Chapter 1159: The Ambush

---

"Andrea!" Camilla yelled.

"I, I got it — " Andrea said as she quickly grasped the gun, closed her eyes and concentrated her mind. She muttered to herself, in a hope that the Magic Slayer did not spot her, and then her eyes snapped open!

In a second, her vision contorted, and everything seemed to overlap with each other and elongate indefinitely. She knew she now possessed the vision of the Magic Eye. As numerous trees and the vast land stretching ahead gradually slid into her view, she felt the surroundings instantly light up.

At the same time, she was connected to Sylvie's mind.

By the time the images around her slid into focus, her eyes had been somewhere several kilometers away. A familiar armored figure rushed into her sight, and Andrea could feel the Magic Slayer brimming with heaving power. His power was so thick and strong as though it had condensed into a physical entity.

Unguarded, the Magic Slayer zoomed through the air. Andrea was not sure whether he was too shocked at the loss of Taquila or at the fled Skeletons.

"How's it going?" Ashes asked darkly.

"The Magic Slayer... isn't aware of our presence!" Andrea said in excitement. "He was flying toward the Red Mist supply line, a little east to our shooting range! Load the gun. This is perfect!"

Ashes gave a curt nod and loaded the gun with that huge God's Stone bullet. The bolt produced a gentle click.

The target was at eight to nine kilometers, not surrounded by any other demons. The wind was coming from the northeast. Out of all the shooting conditions Andrea had thought of, this was the most ideal one. She thus took her aim at the Magic Slayer while

holding her breath.

Thousands of lines stretched away toward the Magic Slayer, some of them swirling and some twisting. However, most of them immediately faded out, leaving only one silver curve shimmering before her.

Andrea knew that she had located her target.

She felt her magic power inside her dropping rapidly. Andrea knew this would be her only chance to kill the demon!

Andrea clenched her teeth and pulled the trigger.

With an earsplitting explosion, Andrea felt something bludgeon her shoulder heavily and started to sway backwards when Ashes caught her just in time in her arms.

"I really don't like you holding me like this," Andrea protested airily while twitching her lips. Her shoulder was now numb and swollen with pain. Andrea knew she had to seek Nana later for treatment.

One drawback of a large-caliber weapon was its high recoil, which was unavoidable no matter how many buffers installed to the gun. Andrea had already realized during the test that this weapon could only be used once, despite that they could produce tons of God's Stone bullets. The operation was physically and mentally demanding, and the weapon itself was so heavy it was almost all that the Magic Ark could carry.

Nevertheless, Andrea was confident in her superb shooting skill.

Only savages preferred a ferocious close-range combat.

For example, the one who was now pulling her back belonged to that category.

"I hold you back only because of Sylvie," Ashes said gruffly while rolling her eyes. "How did that go? Did the Magic Slayer — "

"Just a minute," Andrea said as she pressed her finger to her lips.

"The bullet is still en route."

The silver thread was shrinking rapidly. It was not attached to the Magic Slayer but brushed past him and formed a tiny angle, as though the bullet and the demon were vying with each other for the same destination.

The God's Stone would not deviate from its course once it escaped from the muzzle. The only variable was the target. If the Magic Slayer changed his direction, then all their effort would be in vain. It took 25 seconds for the bullet to reach the Magic Slayer. The only thing she could do now was to pray that the demon would stay where he was.

Gusts of winds continued to push the bullet from the east to the west, making sure that its speed did not drop. Andrea held her breath as the bullet drew close to the demon. For a moment, she even broke her silence.

"Don't move. Don't move. Don't move..." she muttered out loud.

Just at that moment, the Magic Slayer turned around abruptly, and their eyes met!

Andrea was frozen to the spot.

The next moment, the falling bullet landed precisely on the demon's back.

The God's Stone crumbled under immense pressure and splintered into numerous tiny pieces, but the damage was nothing next to what the Magic Slayer sustained.

Andrea had not expected that the small stone would generate such enormous power. The demon's thick armor was ripped open, and his blood and inner organ gushed out like a muddy waterfall from the large hole created by the bullet.

As the hole was too huge, the body of the Magic Slayer snapped in half. The demon rolled over in the air and then plummeted to the ground.

It took Andrea a while to come out of the trance. She swallowed hard and then said, "The Magic Slayer is... dead."

"We did it?" Margie asked jubilantly.

"Yes," Sylvie said on a deep sigh. "The bullet slashed the demon in half. Even Nana wouldn't be able to cure him in such severe condition."

"Good job," Ashes said as she patted Andrea on the shoulder and then instructed over the Sigil of Listening, "Lightning, ask the 'Seagull' to come over here. We're done. Let's head back."

"Got it," Lightning replied quickly.

They immediately disassembled the giant gun and waited for the return of the other unit from the east, ready to pack up and go home. Everyone was glad that the war was finally over.

Except Andrea.

The whole ambush went just as they had planned, except for that last sinister glance the Magic Slayer cast her.

Andrea could still feel a chill lingering on down her spine.

Did he spot her?

How could that be? The Magic Slayer had been eight or nine kilometers away from her, his vision obscured by the jungles between them. It was almost impossible for him to find her. Plus, the demon had not, particularly, attempted to seek her but simply locked his eyes on her directly as if he had known she was there a long time ago.

Further, why had Sylvie not noticed anything unusual when she had seen the demon look backward? Did she think that this incident was too frivolous to have her attention?

Regardless, the Magic Slayer was now dead. Whether it was a coincidence or not, there was no need to further probe into this matter.

Andrea rubbed her forehead and suddenly stopped dead.

She remembered Ashes had been wounded by the Magic Slayer when she had tried to protect Leaf.

"By the way, how long does it take you to heal up minor injuries such as a shallow cut?" Andrea asked while turning to Ashes.

Ashes answered with a shrug, "One to two hours approximately. Why?"

"In other words, you'll feel better in just ten minutes, right?" Andrea pursued while gazing at Ashes avidly. "Are you feeling better now?"

Ashes was mildly taken aback for a second, her hand reaching for her cheeks involuntarily, and said, "That's strange... It still hurts a bit."

Sylvie was the first to realize something went wrong. Horror-struck, she forced herself to reopen the Magic Eye, and fear leavened her exhilaration. "Watch, watch out!"

Ashes yanked out her sword immediately and swung it upwards.

With an almost inaudible clang, a shadow brushed past the blade with such enormous strength it collided with Margie and sent her flying through the air.

No sooner had the other witches realized what had happened than a slender, blue-skinned, manlike demon ambled over.

"Found... you," he drawled complacently.

The very word chilled Andrea to the bone.

To her astonishment, she had not sensed any fluctuation in the magic power since the demon presented himself.

Her heart sank to the bottom as a surge of despair stole through her.



# Chapter 1160: A Trap

---

"Margie!" Ashes screamed and stepped between the Magic Slayer and the other witches.

Margie responded with a series of hacking cough.

She was still alive, but barely.

"You're pretty fast, Extraordinary," the Magic Slayer said in a calm voice, casting her a sorrowful look which did not usually appear on a demon's face. "If you didn't try to block me, she could have died painlessly. You're only making her suffer."

At this point, Andrea suddenly came to the realization that it was not by a pure coincidence that the Magic Slayer targetted Margie. He had taken everything into consideration before this move, including Margie's limited fighting capacity and her unique ability of maneuvering the Magic Ark. As Margie was the key to their transportation, eliminating her was pretty much cutting off their retreat.

Andrea bit her lip and stole a backward glance at Margie. A bone spear had penetrated her shoulder, blood oozing out of her wound and trickling down the corner of her mouth. Apparently, the spear had hurt her lung. Had Ashes not blocked the demon in time, Margie would have probably died on spot.

Given such circumstances, Margie definitely could not operate the Magic Ark anymore.

But how did the Magic Slayer know Margie's ability?

"You're the 'eye' of human beings, right? You really created us a lot of trouble by directing that fiery rain." The Magic Slayer pointed at Sylvie and then at Andrea, whose heart dropped even faster as the demon continued, "And you must be that genius shooter. You probably wouldn't be able to do much harm to us 400 years ago, but things become different now. You appear to be more

difficult than Transcendents. It's good that you've finally met each other."

At this words, he placed his right hand over his chest and then said, "Please let me introduce myself. I'm Ursrook, the commander of the Expedition Corp, as well as the very person who'll give you eternal rest."

Beyond a doubt, this was a well-planned, carefully-calculated trap.

Andrea's face turned a nasty shade of green.

When did they start to associate the Magic Slayer with great magic power?

Right... After Leaf had been attacked in the north of the Misty Forest, everybody had the impression that the Magic Slayer possessed extraordinary power.

In fact, they had started to think that way even before that incident had occurred.

When Lightning had encountered the Magic Slayer for the first time, she had sensed his stupendous magic power, so powerful that everybody just naturally believed that the Magic Eye could easily detect it.

They were thus further misled by their predetermined impression, firmly believing that the Magic Slayer was continuously upgrading himself and that Sylvie had everything under control.

Nevertheless, everything was a false illusion created by the Magic Slayer.

He enticed them out of hiding.

Had he known their plan all along?

But this did not make any sense! Even if the demons noticed Sylvie and Andrea and decided to set up a trap to eliminate them,

this Senior Demon named Usrook did lose Taquila and sacrifice thousands of demons on the Fertile Plains! He might not care that much about the lives of his subordinates, but how could he just abandon the ruin? Without the God's Stone, the demons would not be able to erect the Obelisk, which meant they would lose their foothold on the Fertile Plains in the next 400 years. Wasn't the cost a little too dear?

Were they really worth the demon making such a huge sacrifice?

Andrea felt her head swimming as a multitude of thoughts crammed into her head. It was Sylvie who asked the question that bothered her.

"... Why? Taquila should be more important than us!"

The Magic Slayer was surprisingly patient this time. He shook his head and replied tersely, "I can't tell you."

"Can't you just indulge a dying person's curiosity?"

"But you aren't dying," Ursook jeered. "You aren't giving up even in this desperate situation, are you?"

"What's he waiting for?"

"Is he awaiting his God's Stone of Toss to be recharged?"

His arm did not shrivel either.

Anyway, this was a chance. Andrea swallowed hard. She knew there was no chance for Sylvie, Camilla and Margie to stop the Magic Slayer, but she and Ashes might more or less hold him back, although she barely had any magic power left.

The only person they could now rely on was Lightning.

The fact that she had not shown up yet indicated that she had noticed something wrong. If she could send the 'Seagull' to support them, there would still be a chance to snatch a victory out of defeat!

It would be simply more advisable to play for time by asking

more questions.

There were indeed so many questions burning inside her.

At this thought, Andrea turned to the Magic Slayer and asked heavily, "I don't understand... Even if we were misled, it isn't likely that we'll miss a lurking enemy. We checked everything before firing. You were eight or nine kilometers away from Taquila, and you couldn't possibly get here within a second. Where did you hide yourself?"

"We've dug many underground passages over the past years at the rear of Taquila instead of the front," Ursrook answered leisurely. "The entrance of the passage is hidden among the God's Stones, so it's hard to spot. Plus, the passage forked out deep down underneath the ground, so it's perfectly normal that you failed to notice them." He looked up at the sky and said, "Human beings are monitoring the area above, right? You did do a good job. That's why you fell into our trap without realizing it."

"There are passages nearby?" Andrea felt a jolt of uneasiness in the pit of her stomach. "Even though you were hiding underground, it still isn't easy to spot us on such a vast land. We constantly moved from one place to another. How did you find us?"

"I didn't find you. You found me," the Magic Slayer drawled as a malicious smile suddenly flutter over his face. "Right, not only one person saw me... Where's that flying little girl? If you have a plan B, your reinforcements should have arrived by now, right?"

A dreadful leaden feeling prevailed Andrea instantly.

"It sees you the moment you see it" — that was exactly what the Eye Demon did. Had she just shot an Eye Demon? But an Eye Demon should be much larger than the Magic Slayer. Did Ursrook somehow make that decoy have the Eye Demon's ability?

Regardless, this did not even matter now. At this moment,

Andrea realized where her uneasiness came from.

There must be demons other than the Magic Slayer hiding underground.

The Magic Slayer must be waiting for his reinforcements so that they could kill them all.

Just then, several grenades whizzed out of the woods and darted toward Ursrook!

The Magic Slayer shot up in the air and dodged the grenades gracefully. The grenades landed magnificently on the ground with an almighty crash.

Before the stirred air around them tranquilized, bullets had hailed down at the Magic Slayer.

Ursrook climbed higher, and his body emanated a ghostly blue glow.

"The God's Punishment Witches are here!" Sylvie exclaimed with excitement.

"Are you all OK?" Zoe dashed out of the woods and stepped between the demon and the witches, followed by the other seven God's Punishment Witches who immediately shielded the defeated witches.

"Go. We have to get out of here — "Andrea shouted at the other witches, having no time to provide further explanation.

Meanwhile, Ursrook slowly raised his arm.

There came two muted, distant whooshes.

Sylvie paled, who knew better what that sounds meant than anyone else. "Watch out. It's the Spider Demons!"

Two gleamy black stone pillars flew past above them and showered down long needles after they exploded.

Andrea summoned what remained of her magic power, whipped

the air around them and attempted to wrench the falling needles away.

However, nothing happened. Her magic power was shattered by a black flash.

The Magic Slayer generated the anti-magic area!

Elena, who was closest to Andrea, scooped her up and sprinted up to a tree nearby.

It was a fraction of a second that seemed to stretch into years.

Andrea felt her body rising and her eyes streaming. By the time she finally landed, her legs were numb.

# Chapter 1161: A Slim Hope

---

"Don't move," said Elena.

With another two whooshes, one stone needle was slashed in half. The numbness gradually dissolved into an excruciating pain that seared through her legs.

Andrea clenched her teeth, managing to suppress her groan. As she looked up, she saw thousands of needles rain down where everybody had stood a moment ago. Had the God's Punishment Witches not come to their rescue, they would have probably been dead by now.

Nevertheless, even for the God's Punishment Witches, it was hard to avoid all the showering needles. One stone needle had forced its way into Andrea's legs and knees and penetrated them obliquely. Through furled flesh, Andrea could vaguely see her bones. Her pants were soaked in blood.

Elena was no better than her. One needle reached her stomach. Fortunately, the God's Punishment Witches could not feel pain, which enabled Elena to still concentrate on the fray.

Within a few seconds, perspiration ran down Andrea's forehead. She forced herself to gulp down one of the painkillers produced by Leaf, struggling to pull herself together.

Ashes was now fighting the Magic Slayer strenuously.

Everyone looked a little unkempt and windswept after this narrow escape. Many sustained injuries. They definitely could not dodge a second round of stone needles.

Just then, there was a clattering of footsteps coming from the depth of the forest.

Andrea realized that there must be some other demons other than the two Spider Demons awaiting them.

However, bounded by the wounded witches, the God's Punishment Witches could not commit themselves totally to the battle.

The situation was precarious.

Andrea grasped Elena's hand and croaked, "Head to the west, before it's too late!"

"West?" Elena echoed, momentarily stunned. "But the First Army is in the south..."

"I don't think we can go that way anymore. The demons must be waiting for us there. The only place in which we could take refuge is the Misty Forest in the west — " There were probably numerous well-prepared, fully-recharged demons down in the underground passages. If they rashly ran into their ambush, they would be doomed. Although the Misty Forest was far away from the First Army, at least the demons would have to travel a long way to pursue them.

It suddenly dawned on Andrea that the Magic Slayer was probably not waiting for his reinforcements but was waiting for his army to assemble. Their underground passages must have covered every inch of the land so that the witches would not have a single chance to escape.

The demon army probably had taken action when the decoy had flown out of Taquila.

"I see," Elena said while nodding and informed her fellow companions.

Meanwhile, Ursrook successfully dodged all the grapeshots whizzing toward him whilst gliding along the outer ring of the defense effortlessly. He conjured gusts of wind that consumed the witches' energies. A shield of blue light protected him from harms in any form. Apparently, singular shots could not cause him serious injuries.



When all the witches were congregated, the Mad Demons arrived at the forest.

"Look out for the spears!" Ashes yelled as she slashed a bone spear flying toward her in half.

The God's Punishment Witches, on the other hand, threw more grenades to defend against the hailing spears. For a moment, there was quite a commotion at the clearing.

Andrea knew that their greatest crisis had yet to be resolved.

She snatched the Sigil of Listening from Ashes and shouted at Lightning, "Find and kill the two Spider Demons!"

"But — "

"Only you and Maggie can do it. Go! You'll help us a lot if you succeed!"

The Spider Demons typically projected stone needles every seven or eight minutes. It had been three minutes since their last attack. If they failed to eliminate the Spider Demons before their second shot, they would all be killed on the battlefield.

"And ask Tilly to run!" Ashes added, without looking back.

"I..." Lightning hesitated but finally chose to obey. She said through gritted teeth, "Got it. Please hold on, you guys!"

"Of course we will," Andrea said as she summoned a bitter smile. "We haven't given up yet..." With these words, she turned to Elena and said, "Give me a weapon!"

"Are you sure?" Elena asked, her brows drawing together. "You'll slip off my back if you don't hold tight."

"Don't worry. I'll be perfectly fine with just one hand."

She then took the bolt rifle from Elena, pulled the bolt between her teeth and loaded the gun, after which, she propped her hand on Elena's shoulder, ready to fire. Even though she lost her legs, blinding with pain, with scarcely any magic power left, she was

still a formidable sniper.

Savage Ashes was still fighting fiercely.

How could she surrender?

...

"Lightning... what should we do, coo?" Maggie asked anxiously.

"Stay calm," Lightning said as she watched dozens of Mad Demons sprint in the forest and thick smoke coil in the distant sky. She forced herself to concentrate. Andrea was right. Her only strength was her tremendous flying speed. She could not let the Magic Slayer block her power again.

A great explorer should learn to maintain his composure and carefully analyze the situation. Since she could not provide much assistance in helping the witches retreat, killing the Spider Demons seemed to be more practical. To kill these monsters housed in stones, she had to utilize the grenade propellers newly developed by His Majesty.

"You go find the Spider Demons, and I'll contact the 'Seagull'. Princess Tilly has the weapons we need!" Lightning instructed curtly after making up her mind.

"Got it, aw!" Maggie yelled as she turned into a gray goshawk and shot high up in the air.

Lightning raised her speed to the maximum. Within a blink, she had reached the glider far away from the ambush field.

"Where are they? How's the plan going?" Wendy asked apprehensively as she pulled back the cabin door.

"There's no time to explain. I need the spare weapons!"

Lightning crept into the cabin and fastened the propeller and the grenades to her back when Tilly asked, "Things aren't going well, right?"

Lightning nodded and said hesitantly, "Yes, Ashes asked you to

leave as soon as possible."

"I see. I'm leaving right away."

Lightning and Wendy were both frozen for a second.

"Because my stay won't help her with anything but only give her more pressure..." Tilly said, a tinge of tremor in her voice as though she was fighting back her words that were threatening to come out. "My instinct is telling me that it's best to return to the campsite."

"Your Highness..."

"But tell her that I'll come back! The 'Seagull' will soon bring new reinforcements. Tell them to hang in there just a little longer!"

Just then, a goshawk wailed in the distance.

"I'll let Ashes know," Lightning promised as she leapt out of the cabin while casting Tilly one last glance.

The weapons on her back weighed her down. Lightning dropped around ten meters before she was able to steady herself. If the Magic Slayer came after her again, there would be no chance for her to escape this time.

She needed to trust her friends and be brave!

Lightning took a deep breath of the cold air and zoomed in the direction Maggie had pointed out.

30 seconds later, she caught sight of her target — a Spider Demon that lay flat on the ground, slowly spewing out obsidian. The ground underneath it had sunk a few inches, forming a large dent, at the bottom of which she could vaguely see a few small holes that appeared to lead somewhere else.

Two Mad Demons were guarding the Spider Demon. Lightning hurtled low over the treetops, aimed at the crooked monster, whose armor was flown open, totally unaware of the danger above, and pulled the trigger without the slightest hesitation.

With a moderate clang, the grenade sank into the Spider Demon diagonally. The heat generated by the high-explosive shell instantly penetrated its stomach, crushing its veins and muscles underneath the obsidian!

With a horrible, bloodcurdling wail, the Spider Demon collapsed.

# Chapter 1162: The Last Struggle

---

The Mad Demon guards howled with rage, snatched up their bone spears, and their arms began rapidly expanding.

Lightning would have dropped the weapons and fled immediately if this had occurred in the past. However, she was now well aware that there was one more Spider Demon to kill. The only way for her to avoid the infuriated Mad Demons would be to distract them.

She thus flew straight upward and flitted past the treetops. The moment she fluttered out of the sight of the demons, she turned around abruptly and streaked across the forest. At almost the same time, two bone spears darted up toward her through the dense branches and twigs and whistled by.

Lightning heaved a deep sigh of relief, wheeled around, and headed straight to her next target as Maggie instructed.

Her heart, however, plummeted to the bottom of her chest as she felt a surge of ominous feeling when she saw the second Spider Demon.

The Spider Demon was about to shoot, its stone pillar aloft in the air and its intertwined veins emanating a venomous blue glow!

Yet Lightning had yet to load her gun.

It was too late.

"Maggie, distract it. Stop it from shooting the stone pillar!"

"Owh!"

The goshawk, which had been hovering above the forest, plunged and soon transformed into a giant Devilbeast as it dropped.

The Mad Demons guarding the Spider Demon were confused as they were pressed to the ground.

Maggie's enormous body crashed into the Spider Demon with a

loud bang similar to a gunshot. Obscured by the dust in the air, the Spider Demon stumbled, swung sideways, and almost slumped to the ground on his back.

Just at that moment, the stone pillar left the Spider Demon and hit the Mad Demons who had lost their balance. The pillar swept over the ground, hurtled straight into the forest at a horrific speed, and rolled upon the ground before it came to a complete halt a few yards away. It snapped into pieces as it struck the ground and created a fan-shaped clearing in the dense forest.

"Nicely done!" Lightning exclaimed as she loaded the gun and took aim at the Spider Demon, which was now struggling to straighten up in the earnest with its legs flying in all directions. Nevertheless, Lightning would not let it do so.

The grenade landed precisely on the Spider Demon's stomach. The flames and heated air resulting from the explosion created a large hole on the other side of the demon's body.

After confirming that the Spider Demon was immobilized, Lightning hoisted up Maggie, who had returned to her normal appearance, and asked, "Are you OK?"

"I'm fine! I used the biggest muscle on my shoulder to strike it!" Maggie said with confidence as she rolled up her sleeve and swung her arm casually. Her face, however, instantly screwed up in pain as she shot her hand upwards.

"It appears that your muscle isn't strong enough..." Lightning said softly while stroking Maggie's head. "I'll feed you a lot of barbecued meat in the future so that next time, you won't get hurt. But now, I need you to hold up a little longer. Can you do that for me?"

"Yes!" Maggie said while nodding vigorously.

"Then come on," Lightning said as she crouched down and placed the pigeon on her head. "Let's go help the others in the name of the

Neverwinter Exploration Group!"

...

"Bang!"

Andrea pulled the trigger and shot down a demon who had just poked its head out.

How many had she shot?

Her jaw was numb with pain. She could taste the blood between her teeth and felt chipped metal scrubbing her tongue. She was not sure whether it was rusty iron or her own broken teeth.

"Perhaps dozens?"

Andrea believed she had shot down at least ten demons. However, the demons did not retreat but, on the contrary, retaliated even more fiercely.

The Mad Demons, whom she had never taken very seriously before, suddenly became very difficult enemies. Since there were so many of them, they attacked the witches from various directions. Andrea was glad that she had this advanced weapon, otherwise It would have been almost impossible to stop them.

Technically, the forest was not an ideal place to have a gunfight since the Mad Demons could easily dodge bullets while throwing spears at them between the trees. The God's Punishment Witches equipped with firearms but no shields, on the other hand, could only rely on their physical combat skills to avoid the demons' attacks.

To make things worse, there was also a high level Senior Demon, probably transformed from the Lord of Hell, that was apparently a lot weaker than Ursrook in terms of magic power but with a more sturdy, muscular physique. It had developed the nasty habit of using trees as its weapons. Every time it unrooted a tree, the God's Punishment Witches needed to work together to block the attack. Meanwhile, it also constantly built mounds of earth to protect the

other demons. As a result, the joint attack of both the Senior Demon and the Magic Slayer significantly slowed the witches down.

Andrea repeated her movement mechanically. She loaded the gun, took the aim, and then shot. She was slowly losing track of what she was doing as pain and fatigue washed over her.

"Andrea, watch your right-hand side!" After two rounds of spearing, Sylvie yelled.

A group of Mad Demons distracted the God's Punishment Witches. The Magic Slayer wrenched himself free from Ashes' giant sword and streaked at Elena and Andrea like a ghost.

Andrea raised her gun, but Ursrook sliced her weapon in half with a knifehand strike.

Then there came the second blow.

Everything seemed to freeze in that split second. Andrea saw a ghostly blue light erupt from the Magic Slayer's clawed hand as it was about to swing down at her.

It was over.

She braced herself for death as she was paralyzed by fear.

Nevertheless, death did not visit her this day.

At the last moment, Elena whipped around and took the full blow.

The cut reached Elena's ribs and inner organs. Even though she was a God's Punishment Witch, it was impossible for her to continue to fight.

Elena fell to the ground.

"No — " Zoe shouted, who turned around and fired at Ursrook furiously. The Magic Slayer failed to dodge such a close-range shot. His shield finally shattered and his body was covered in bullet holes from which blood spurted out.



To Zoe's surprise, the Magic Slayer leered. He flew through the air backwards and planted his hand into his body, as though he did not feel any pain. His wounds immediately healed by themselves as his magic power welled up.

"Monster..." Sylvie, who saw everything, mumbled involuntarily in despair.

"I kill to improve and upgrade. It's very impertinent to call me a monster," Ursrook said with an air of irony as he returned to the other Senior Demon and took a gas tank from the latter. "Your every single wound and all the energy you've lost will nourish me! You should have foreseen your failure. Stop struggling, for it'll only increase your pain. If you yield now, I will grant you a painless death as a reward for your valiance!"

"Go to hell!" Zoe snarled. "I'll never yield to a demon, even if I have to die over and over again. I'll tear you into pieces!"

Andrea, however, did not hear the conversation. Everything, including the gunshots, the growls, the screams, and the warnings, seemed so far away from her. She slowly crawled to Elena and held the latter in her arms, muttering, "Why did you... save me?"

"Aargh..." Elena coughed out blood and murmured with a faint smile, "I should have been killed years ago. I lived longer than I should simply because I want something in return. We've reached our limits, but you still have great potential. Doesn't that give me a good reason to save you?"

While looking at grief-stricken Andrea, Elena gently stroked her cheeks and said, "Don't be sad. I don't feel pain at all. Really, it's nothing. I'm just... a bit... tired."

Her voice gradually trailed away and her breath became deep and steady as if she had fallen asleep.

Andrea held Elena's hand reassuringly. Her vision blurred.

Presently, the witches had completely stopped. Two more God's

Punishment Witches were down, and the demons slowly closed in.

"Are we going to end up dying here?"

Andrea felt her strength start to escape her. A surge of giddiness flooded over her, and she lost her balance and fell to the ground.

Dark clouds scudded across the sky, a premonition of an upcoming storm.

In the overcast, leaden sky, she dimly spied a fleck of gold glimmer through the thick clouds.

This was the last thing Andrea saw before she lost her consciousness.

# Chapter 1163: Transcendent

---

...

Ashes noticed that her movement became faster.

She could have stopped the bone spear that had severely injured Margie had she swung the sword a little faster.

She could have stopped the Magic Slayer from attacking Elena had she moved a bit faster.

She could have blocked all the attacks from the Mad Demon had she been a little faster.

Her magic power currently running wild in her body strengthened every inch of her muscles and bones, creating a burning sensation on her skin. The pain somehow made her even more concentrated.

If only she could be a little faster!

Ashes had, once again, stepped into the same realm she had entered during her first encounter with the Magic Slayer. Indeed, she was even faster. Time seemed to move at a much slower pace. She could see every single detail of the battlefield, such as the tiny cracks on bone spears, the puddle underneath the demons, Margie's heaving chest, Zoe's trickling blood and so on. She could kill and rescue almost at the same time.

Ashes felt the surrounding magic power swarming into her and spreading all over her body. She reckoned this might be what Agatha referred to as an upgrade. Perhaps, it was about her time. The converging magic power not only strengthened her physically but also sharpened her senses, enabling her to fight two Senior Demons concurrently.

But she could not beat them.

"Clang!"

The giant sword clashed with the Magic Slayer's arm, sparks flying off the blade.

"What's the matter? Is this the fastest you could get?" Ursrook jeered as he streaked back before Ashes could give him another blow. "Your friends will die if this is all you can do. Perhaps, you're planning to abandon them?"

Ashes ignored his sarcastic comment and swung her sword at a spear zooming toward her.

"Don't listen to his nonsense. That freaking monster is trying to provoke you into madness!" Zoe advised, panting, as she loaded the gun with the rest of the few bullets. "If you fall for his trick, we'll lose."

"I understand," Ashes said, nodding calmly.

It was clear that the Magic Slayer attempted to break through her defense in collaboration with the scattered Mad Demons, who came up to her at a gallop against the gunfire. Their seamless cooperation forced Ashes to remain extremely focused throughout the whole battle.

The 100 Mad Demons at the Magic Slayer's command were perhaps the best soldiers in Taquila. They had yet to completely defeat the witches simply because the eight Taquila witches were also skillful and experienced combatants.

But the Magic Slayer was right about one thing.

This was the fastest she could reach.

Every inch of her skin was on fire at the moment, which was the exact sign of a power rebound. Ashes, who had been training herself on a regular basis, had never experienced such a backfire before. She could have escaped from the battlefield and recuperated until her body adjusted itself to the new power intensity. By that time, her skills would have definitely improved by leaps and bounds.

Yet time did not permit her to do so.

She could not save everyone but only herself.

She needed to do something more than this to pull them all out of the dilemma.

Perhaps, Alice, the Queen of Witches, would also feel lost if she were in her current position.

"You're an Extraordinary. You were born to have great potential. However, it requires a heart of steel to overcome and upgrade yourself." Phyllis' words suddenly came floating out of her memories. "As far as I know, all the Transcendents in the Union upgraded in battles, and those who couldn't successfully become Transcendents were all eventually killed by the demons. I hope you won't be one of them."

It wasn't until then that Ashes realized it was totally a different story to suit the action to the words.

She was now facing two options. One was to stay alive and reunite with Tilly, whereas the other was to upgrade herself and enter a new realm never achieved by human beings.

To enter this new realm, she had to burn herself.

"If we plan to use our magic power to achieve something, it would guide us in the direction we desire." Phyllis' voice was misty and distant as though coming from Heaven. It was like a long echo of murmur, a muted thunder rolling over the sky.

"What are you aiming to achieve exactly?"

"Look here. Fire!"

BOOM!

The silent battlefield suddenly erupted into another roar, followed by a shrill scream of the demons.

Ashes looked around and found Lightning just join the battle!

The grenade caught the Mad Demons offguard and sent them flying straight through the air. The two closer demons were instantly penetrated by the flying shells and lost their fighting capacity.

"Awh — " A gigantic Devilbeast emerged from the woods and bit the demons that charged at Lightning whilst pushing through the dense trees.

Under the joint effort of Lightning and Maggie, the number of the Mad Demons was soon reduced to five or six.

"Hold on. We are coming to help you, awh!"

"Annoying buzzing flies," the Magic Slayer mumbled, frowning, who turned away from Ashes to Lightning and Maggie.

The other Senior Demon thus took its superior's place, holding a large tree.

In the meantime, two bone spears cleaved the air, one aiming at staggering Zoe and the other Andrea on the ground.

It happened again.

If she ignored the Magic Slayer, Lightning would be in danger. If she went after him, then she would not be able to save the others.

Since a fast speed could no longer solve the problem, she had to resort to power that transcended the speed.

At that moment, Ashes made her decision.

Perhaps, she had already made her decision on the numerous nights she had spent at Neverwinter with the other witches, on the very evening she had conversed with Phyllis, and when Tilly had said "compared to the avenger you, I prefer the current you".

"Sorry, Tilly."

Ashes muttered as she stepped forward.

"What are you aiming to achieve exactly?"

"I want to protect them."

In an instant, she "saw" a roaming sea of magic power beyond any languages. Thousands of eyes were watching, murmuring, through the rushing currents.

Ashes lifted her limit and accepted all of them.

...

Ursrook was suddenly alarmed halfway.

He whipped around and saw Ashes point her sword at the sky, its blade basking in a haze of golden light.

The moment that golden light hit his eyes, Ursrook felt his move suddenly become incredibly slow as if a swamp underneath were dragging him down.

He was not the only person who became slower.

The air seemed to grow thick and heavy as well.

Ursrook had had similar experiences before, but he did not expect it to happen at this moment.

How could that be possible?

This was not the power of a Magic Stone but of the witch herself!

He strained to stare up, half hoping that he was wrong, but the dazzling golden light above him clearly showed that this strike was going to be even more powerful than the one from that red-haired witch.

There was no chance for him to dodge it.

If the sword struck him, he would die.

Realizing what was going to happen, Ursrook mustered all his strength and generated the anti-magic area.

Precisely at that moment, Ashes' sword thrashed down.

A jet of blinding flash cracked through the air and lit up the

entire continent.

...

Lan's eyes snapped open.

She rose to her feet, passed the people in complete stillness and walked slowly to the window.

This world she was living in had not awakened yet. Everything had lapsed into a trance, including the outpouring rain outside the window and the champagne ready to fill the glass. They were all suspending in the air, forming a part of the background behind her.

There should not have been any sounds in this world when even time was frozen.

However, in this impenetrable, velvety blackness, she heard thunders roar in the distance.

Lan pushed open the window and gazed upon the distant sky in silence.

...

By the time Lightning's eyes acclimatized, she discovered, to her dismay, that the trees around the clearing had been burned to the ground. Wisps of smoke spiraled up horribly, and the air was heavy with a pungent smell.

"What just happened?"

All she could remember was that a Mad Demon lurking behind a tree had lunged at her when her focus had been solely on the Magic Slayer. She had thus no choice but to throw the propeller at it, in an attempt to stop the demon. The next moment, she was enveloped by a beautiful haze of golden rays.

But now, all the Mad Demons were gone, leaving the two Senior Demons alone on the battlefield.

The one transformed from the Lord of Hell slumped in a heap on



the ground, its thick skin burned and cracked, almost dying.

The Magic Slayer was no better than his fellow companion, half of his body completely gone, black lights etching into his wounds. He was rooted to the ground, but for some reason, Lightning was utterly petrified by what she saw.

"Right... Ashes!"

She quickly looked around and breathed out a sigh of relief.

Ashes was still standing there, her sword in her hand, guarding the other witches.

"Are you OK — " Lightning asked as she flew to Ashes but the latter immediately cut across her.

"Get everybody out of here. Stay as far away from here as possible!"

"Huh?"

"Do it! Leave them to me, before I lose control!"

Ashes' voice cut through the air with a hint of starchiness, forcing Lightning to swallow down what she was about to say. It thus suddenly occurred to Lightning that Ashes simply did not want anybody to interfere with the battle between her and the demons. As Lightning gazed into Ashes' golden eyes, she somehow understood what heavenly thunder stood for.

Lightning thus asked Maggie to transform back into the Devilbeast and helped everyone onto Maggie's back. Although it was now impossible for Maggie to fly in the sky, she could still run at a fairly decent speed on the ground.

A moment later, both Lightning and Maggie disappeared into the forest.

After running about 100 meters, Maggie asked, "How did Ashes receive divine revelation? She's not having a Sigil of God's Will with her."

"I don't know either, but I'm sure about one thing," Lightning broke off, her hands clenching into fists in excitement. "She's now a Transcendent!"

# Chapter 1164: A Destiny without a Choice

---

Dark clouds continued to converge and overspread the sky. A jet of flash cracked through the air every now and then, followed by muffled thunderbolts.

Ashes could no longer hold back the blood in her mouth after Lightning and Maggie left with the other witches. Her legs started to give away, and she leaned on her sword to maintain her stance.

Her magic power was almost exhausted after that deadly blow. Although more magic power swarmed into her body, she could not control it. Every single vein in her body was screaming protests. The pain resulting from the power rebound was unbearable.

She did not know how long she could hold up, but she knew she could not back away.

Otherwise, all her efforts would be wasted.

The thunderbolts had indeed severely injured the Magic Slayer.

Half of his body where the Stone of Flight was embedded vaporized. His movement should have largely restricted and his power ebbed away.

However, Ashes did not feel such a change.

She could still sense the lurking danger around her, and she knew perfectly well that the Magic Slayer was still able to fight.

That was why she had asked Lightning to get everybody out of here.

The stormy magic power was actually a combination of both Ashes' and the Magic Slayer's.

"Rise. You must finish the enemy before he finishes you!"

Ashes slowly got to her feet, her teeth clenched, and very painfully, took a step forward.

Just then, the burned Senior Demon also gradually straightened up.

"Damn it! Is it still alive?"

Ashes had directed her blow mainly to the Magic Slayer. She did not, however, expect that the other Senior Demon would survive such a magnificent strike that would normally be fatal to regular Mad Demons. Had she foreseen such a result, she would have aimed at that Senior Demon as well.

She was mildly surprised that the Senior Demon neither fled nor launched itself at her. Instead, it waddled toward Ursrook and stopped.

"What is it doing? Does it want to protect the Magic Slayer?"

Ashes' hand rested on the hilt of her sword.

"Very well. Then I'll send both of you to hell!"

...

As the light penetrated the anti-magic area, Ursrook heard someone call upon him deep down inside.

In that split second, he sensed a queer connection.

Through the blinding golden light, Ursrook saw something more profound, something that he had been yearning to obtain, a realm that had denied him.

He glided through, and his feet thus imprinted on the unknown land. This was a crucial step that marked the difference between him and the lord.

However, they were now equal!

He had made so many sacrifices to defend Taquila and ambush the witches. He had even disobeyed the Sky Lord's order.

But everything was worth it!

As he embraced the power from the Realm of Mind, Ursrook

connected his thoughts with his junior guard's immediately.

"Sir, you... you upgraded!" the guard said ecstatically but its voice quickly tailed away. "But I'll soon return to the Origin of Magic and can't... stay with you anymore."

"No, not yet. Actually, I'm very close to the upgrade, but the divine power hit me, so I can't complete my upgrade by myself."

"What... what can I do for you?"

"Abandon yourself to me."

The guard's face lighted up. "Is that all? Leave it to me, sir!"

Ursrook knew that he could have made an attempt to go beyond the limit of the Magic Stone and merge with the Origin of Magic, just as the Extraordinary had done. However, he was not sure about the possible consequence and would rather go in a more conservative way.

Their minds quickly disconnected. When the junior guard struggled to stand up, the Extraordinary also slowly drew up to her full height.

No... he should not call her an Extraordinary anymore.

After over 400 years, there was finally a new Transcendent.

It was obvious that the new Transcendent was trying to recover her strength, which provided him a great opportunity to complete the upgrade.

The junior guard finally stopped in front of Ursrook, its breath feeble like guttered candlelight, but its mind became clearer than ever.

"Sir... will we really be relieved from the fate, win the Battle of Divine Will and reach the inhabited Heaven one day?"

"We will. I promise," Ursrook said, and then he announced the guard's name, "Tartarus."

Tartarus' eyes glistened before the light in its pupils extinguished. "Please, take me with you — " it murmured.

Then the guard got to its feet abruptly and dived its finger into its skull!

...

Aghast, Ashes smelled a great crisis.

The Senior Demon pulled out the magic stone from its head as it howled, along with a large chunk of flesh, and inserted it into the Magic Slayer!

The black light around the Magic Slayer's wound instantly expanded!

She suddenly remembered Roland's words: demons upgraded through Magic Stones. Did Ursrook plan to upgrade himself by taking his guard's Magic Stone?

Anyway, she had to stop them.

Ashes, once again, directed her magic power to the sword, despite the excruciating pain she was suffering.

Another thunder erupted from the sky. When her power reached its peak, Ashes swung her sword a second time.

It was a relatively moderate strike, but golden thunder once gain cracked through the clouds and lashed out to the demons.

Ursrook shrieked, a new arm growing out of the black light around him and stretching out to the thunderbolts.

The explosion generated by the clash of the two powers exhaled a cloud of dust that obscured the vision of both parties.

Ashes' heart sank when the sky gradually cleared up.

The Magic Slayer appeared to be unscathed, and he seemed to have recovered from his previous injuries. His new arm was a lot thicker than his old one, two long thorns sprouting from his

shoulders and elbows, which were very similar to the limbs of the dead Senior Demon.

But he looked far more menacing than before.

"I have to admit that you're a real genius out of all the witches I've met. You not only exceeded the greatest witch in the human history but also opened the gate of the Realm of Mind. For a race which only has a lifespan of less than 100 years, it's very impressive," Ursrook drawled as he stretched out his clawed hand, ripped the Senior Demon's body apart and planted the blood-stained gas tank into him. "Unfortunately, you aren't the only genius here. We live much longer than you and have survived several Battles of Divine Will. I understand it's unfair, but that's your destiny."

"I'm afraid that your game is over." With these words, he lunged at Ashes.

# Chapter 1165: The Eye of A Storm

---

The earth shook under the two's violent clash.

Swords met, as they sent off flashes of light to the surrounding forest. The black light covered the surface of the Magic Slayer and shielded the strikes of the golden thunderbolts. The turbulent magic power brought about a sudden downpour, and the two battling individuals became the eye of this unexpected hurricane.

Both Ashes and Ursrook had exceeded their limits. Their movements became a blurry swirl of light and shadow that slashed through the thick veil of rain, leaving a long mark in the air. Raindrops spluttered and flew off under the impact of the shockwaves. The battle was so intense it was as if two giants were wrestling with each other.

Ashes knew that she had completely lost control over her magic power. It was dissolving her flesh bit by bit, and now she was numb with pain all over that gnawed her skin as a result of the power rebound.

This was definitely not a good sign. Numbness were usually followed by a mental breakdown as well as a decrease in her ability to control her body.

In fact, she was now unable to direct the thunders to a specific spot. The avalanche of her raging magic power was breaking her body and gradually led her to the brink of collapse.

"I see. So this is the consequence of a direct merge with the Origin of Magic." The Magic Slayer looked weary. He wiped the blood off his face after fending Ashes off and said, "You've attained extraordinary power, but such power also consumes you. I'm very curious about what you will become if things go on like that. Will you be reduced to ashes? Or will you lose your humanity and become a mindless monster?"



"Whatever I will become, I'll first kill you." Ashes said darkly as she shook the water off the blade.

"With what? Faith and persistence?" Ursrook sneered. "That does sound like something humans would say. Unfortunately, the past hundreds of years have taught me that they are worthless as petals in the wind."

Ashes did not answer but charged at the Magic Slayer with the giant sword in her hand.

After a short but fierce battle, Ashes had a better understanding of the Magic Slayer's power. The chance of her beating the demon was slim. As the Magic Slayer slowly adapted to his new body, his movements became swifter while his strikes became more powerful and skillful. It appeared that he had regained the control of the pace of the battle, for Ashes felt it increasingly hard to hit her target. Such a consistent yet terrifying change made her truly realize how far a true genius could possibly go.

The only way to kill him was to generate divine power. Ashes did not know how she could have received divine revelation even without a Sigil of God's Will. She only knew her magic power had responded to her and transformed into a golden thunderbolt at her command.

Nonetheless, one thunderbolt was not powerful enough to cause fatal injuries to the Magic Slayer. It could only blast away half of his black light and add a few new cuts on him. She would have to repeat the thunder strikes to kill the demon, but she did not have enough time.

More importantly, the key to generating divine power was time, and the Magic Slayer would definitely not sit around waiting for her attack to charge.

Therefore, Ashes must create an opportunity to focus and summon enough power.

She knew what she should do next.

Ashes dashed to Ursrook in an instant. After a few more slashes with her sword, she missed once on purpose, thus enticing the Magic Slayer to draw close. Seeing the Magic Slayer stretch out his clawed hands, she charged and ran right into him while blocking the vital parts of her body.

The claws passed through her right chest and came out from her elbow.

At that moment, Ursrook's expression changed.

Ashes spluttered blood, but at the same time, both of her hands locked the Magic Slayer in an embrace, and she said in a low voice, "I got you."

Just at that moment, the dark clouds above them started to spin and soon formed a giant storm!

...

"What did you say? Ashes... became a Transcendent?" Agatha exclaimed over the Sigil of Listening.

After flying west for a few miles, Lightning had finally gotten hold of the headquarters and made an urgent request for reinforcements to the Ice Witch. She felt a little better after Agatha confirmed that the First Army would soon come, then she recounted the incident concerning the Magic Slayer.

"I couldn't think of anyone else other than a Transcendent who has such phenomenal power," Lightning said as she slowly rose into the air and gazed upon the jungles behind her. Golden lightning and thunderbolts continued to roar about. Even the Sigil of God's Will could not sustain such a phenomenon that long.

"Extraordinaires typically evolve through battles. If she did become a Transcendent, she should be able to cope with the Magic Slayer. She made the right decision asking you to leave. Anyway... I'm glad that everyone is safe."

Lightning fell silent dolefully. Not everyone in the ambush team was fine, but she decided not to disclose the truth at this moment. She then steered the subject to the demons and asked, "What about the demons? Do they also evolve through battles?"

For some reason, the fear she had felt when she confronted the Magic Slayer lingered on. The wriggling black light around Ursrook's wounds and his terrifying back gave her an ominous feeling.

"There's no record of that in the Union, but according to His Majesty's memory fragments, the demons require high-quality Magic Stones to upgrade their powers," Agatha replied. "Of course, battles are also crucial to them. If my deduction is correct, merging with a Magic Stone is quite similar to the witches entering their adulthood. It is a test – a trial concerning magic power. If the attempt is unsuccessful, the demons would suffer a power rebound. Why do you ask?"

"No, nothing..." Lightning said, biting her lip. "I'm just a bit worried..."

There was a possibility that the Magic Slayer carried a few high-quality Magic Stones with him. However, could he really evolve through battles? When a witch had reached adulthood, she usually spent her entire day in bed, staying focused while awaiting that critical moment.

"Don't worry. Transcendents don't particularly rely on their abilities to fight. If the Magic Slayer has no way to subdue Ashes, I believe we'll soon know who wins the battle," Agatha comforted.

"Yea, I guess...."

Lightning nodded and was about to return to Maggie when suddenly, a muffled roar of thunder in the distance startled her.

A tidal wave of dark clouds converged, and they formed a spinning gray tower that connected the heaven and earth. She had

only seen such a scene in the sea, which typically only appeared when a great storm was about to hit the ocean. By that time, there would be a huge swirl in midair, and any ships that failed to avoid the whirlpool would be torn to pieces by furious waves.

But they were on land.

"What happened?" Agatha asked over the Sigil of Listening, who apparently also heard the noise. "What's that sound?"

Lightning said apprehensively with her nails sank into her flesh, "I wonder when Princess Tilly would send us reinforcements."

"The God's Punishment Witches are loading the 'Seagull'. It'll probably take them 10 to 15 minutes to get there."

"Fifteen minutes... I see." Lightning hung up after a short silence.

After she flew back to Maggie, Lightning started to attend to the wounded.

"That thunderbolt scared me, awh. Will Ashes be okay?" Maggie asked.

"She should be fine. She's now a Transcendent. You just need to take everyone to somewhere safe. You know where you should go, right?"

"Of course, awh. I just need to go around the Taquila ruin and turn to the southwest — Hang on, why me? Are you not coming, awh?"

But as Maggie waited for a reply, all she could hear was silence.

# Chapter 1166: The Victor

---

BOOM!

Tendrils of lightning pierced through the whirlwind, and they slowly began to gather at the center as heavy rain poured on the ground, obscuring the forest. The evolved Magic Slayer and the new Transcendent stood transfixed like two austere statues. Their faces were within an inch from each other.

The wild magic power had completely covered Ashes, whose body was now emanating a dazzling golden glow.

She was the concentration point of all the divine power.

She transformed herself into a weapon of destruction.

"Is this your last resort?" Ursrook bellowed. "You want to kill me by sacrificing yourself. That's beyond stupidity!"

"I won't... let you walk away," Ashes said, panting. Every breath was painful. Blood flooded into her windpipe, and she could taste the nasty tang of blood in her mouth.

Five minutes... Ashes kept telling herself... She only needed another five minutes.

They were basically equal in power right now. As long as she did not let him go, it was impossible for the Magic Slayer to break away from her.

"Do you think I'll fight only with brute force?" Usrook snarled, his water-streaked face contorted in a rage. "It seems that I'm now rooted, but you are forging a cage for yourself!"

Several flashes of black light wriggled out of the Magic Slayer's chest and dived into Ashes' body like some sinister tentacles.

Ashes could not help but groan in agony.

She had thought nothing could be worse than a power rebound, but the black light tortured her in an even more callous and cruel

way. She felt as though numerous tiny needles were attacking her veins in the brain, and she had to force herself to not pass out.

To her horror, in addition to the excruciating pain, those black tentacles started to creep up her body and spread out. The place that the black light had passed bulged as though some squirmy bugs were moving underneath her skin.

Blood spurted out from Ashes mouth. Ashes asked, "What... what did you do?"

"A little present for you that will make you understand the difference between our understanding and control of magic power," Ursrook whispered into Ashes' ear. "To tell you the truth, I should thank you. Thanks to this battle, I've finally evolved. Now, you are even offering yourself to me. I'm looking forward to how far I could grow after I destroy you."

Ashes suddenly realized that this was another form of corruption. The part covered in black light felt oddly disconnected as if it had been detached from her body. Ashes bit her lip, exercising all her efforts to summon her power to fend off the corruption.

"Don't. You. Dare. Possess me!"

As the two powers clashed, Ursrook's face twisted, and his new body suddenly expanded into a distorted and grotesque blob that grew larger than his original size. He was misshapen, with half of the Senior Demon's body and half of his own.

The corruption, however, continued to expand after a momentary pause, and black lines continued to creep up to Ashes' neck.

"Great perseverance," Ursrook commented with a callous and indecent pleasure in his voice. "But that won't work." His appearance had now completely changed after the horrific transformation, and he looked like a genuine monster of lore.

"I... won't..."

"Won't give up? Diligence, faith, perseverance, and relentlessness are merely excuses of the weak. Nobody wants to die. However, those slogans won't change anything, nor will they help your race to live on!"

Searing pain exploded in Ashes's head. Her mouth opened wide like a dumb person, but there was no voice coming out.

Golden flecks shined through the swirl above, but Ashes found her power slowly abandon her.

"We have a much greater power capacity and a longer lifespan than you human beings. You're fighting against overwhelming odds. That's the difference that determines our fates! Both the past two Battles of Divine Will have shown that you'll never beat us!" Ursrook lifted Ashes slowly off the ground and claimed his final judgment, "So, rest in peace. Blame your fate for being human — "

"Don't you — look down upon — humankind!"

Suddenly, a familiar silvery voice came through the pouring rain, which jerked Ashes out of the unconsciousness for a moment.

She turned around with great difficulty and saw a shadow dart out from the woods.

"Is that... Lightning?"

Lightning cleaved the milky curtain of rain, passed the blackened trees and dashed towards Ursrook.

It appeared that she was also carrying something.

Ashes blinked.

"Are those... grenades?"

"Get lost, you low-life!" Ursrook immediately generated the anti-magic area.

When the black light brushed past Lightning, Lightning released

the grenades and changed her course abruptly.

The grenades fell.

They sped on under the momentum toward Ursrook and sprouted their empennages.

"You — " the demon growled, his eyes strained, and with all his remaining strength, he created the blue shield.

The next moment, explosions bloomed outside the shield, yet it was only a prelude to even more destruction. The cone-shaped bullets seething with energies created a dazzling trajectory in the air and shattered the shield with a loud crash. They slashed Ursrook's disfigured body as if hot knives through butter, thus reducing the blob attached to him to a pulp.

The Magic Stone Ursrook had obtained from the Senior Demon crumbled under the fierce onslaught of the shrapnel.

Ursrook let out a bone-chilling shriek!

The black tentacles immediately shrank; the burning pain Ashes was feeling ceased, and she regained her consciousness.

Without slightest of hesitation, Ashes released the accumulated divine power.

The Magic Slayer realized the danger and tried to wrench the witch away, but Ashes refused to slacken her grip.

"You're right. Human beings are weak, but nothing could stop us from moving forward. We'll never back off," she broke off with a tenuous smile on her face. "Because someone is already standing ahead, pointing to us the way forward."

Then golden thunderbolts overspread the black light and filled the entire sky.

Struck by the blinding, white-hot rays, Ursrook was evaporated without even the slightest trace of his existence left behind.

The roar of thunder spread through the Fertile Plains, leaving a



long murmur of echoes.

Soon, the divine power diminished, and Ashes was alone on the vast land.

Lightning slowly rose from the ground and clenched her teeth. When she had collided into the anti-magic area, she had swayed sideways and had been thrown out before crashing into the ground. Luckily, the Magic Slayer had directed the majority of his power to the shield, which had afforded her time to synchronize her power after a narrow escape from the anti-magic area.

As a consequence, she broke one arm and scraped one side of her body.

Lightning limped to Ashes and managed a smile. "We finally... won."

"Yes, thank you. To be honest, I didn't expect that you would come back."

"That's an explorer's instinct. A great explorer always comes for those in need — " Lightning stopped dead, realizing something was wrong. "Hey, what... is happening to you?"

Ashes looked down at her hands. They were turning snow-white and became more and more transparent. She replied, "Perhaps, this is the price I have to pay for burning myself."

"Burning yourself... What do you mean?" Lightning pursued, stunned. Ashes gradually disintegrated into nothingness, and her long hair splintered into numerous tiny white flecks, as though she ceased to exist as a solid entity and became a misty image comprised of fireflies.

"If we want to use magic power to achieve something, it'll lead us to what we desire, but I asked for something more than I could bear..." Ashes said softly. "So that's what I will turn into after merging with magic power... It's better than becoming a monster."

"What, what are you talking about?" Lightning asked, panic-

stricken, attempting to grab Ashes' hand, which immediately pulverized. "Ashes, tell me. What should I do?"

"Tell Tilly that I like her."

The dark clouds were eventually dispersed by the lazy sunbeams that spilled across the earthy land. In the slanting sun rays, Ashes closed her eyes and dissolved into the wind.

Lightning attempted to hold her back but to no avail. With her one good hand still trying to hug the air in front of her, the little girl broke into tears.

...

Lan heaved a deep sigh as she gazed at the dark sky, her eyes downcast.

After a long, melancholic silence, she closed the window and muttered as if she was asking an imaginary figure, or just talking to herself.

"What are you waiting for?"

"There's nothing to hesitate about anymore."

"We need to act faster. Time... is running out."

Her last comment gave way to an inaudible sigh that dispersed into the stillness of time.

# Chapter 1167: Woe

---

...

"Is that so? I got it." Roland's heart sank when he received the news from the frontline. It took him a while to reply. "How are you feeling now? How is your injury?"

But what followed was only a suffocating silence.

Few more minutes passed before Roland spoke again. "This wasn't your fault. You couldn't foresee that the things would unfold in this way. Now, since the Magic Slayer has perished, take a long break and have a good rest."

Roland slumped into a chair after he hung up the telephone and let out a deep sigh.

As if she sensed something, Nightingale strolled slowly to Roland's desk and asked, "Was that Leaf?"

"Yes," Roland answered while closing his eyes. "The war is over. The First Army successfully seized Taquila with minimal loss and also discovered a half-completed tower base in the God's Stone mine. The ambush operation failed, but it has been confirmed that the Magic Slayer was killed. The curse was lifted, which is the fortunate part of all the misfortunes. However..." he paused for a second and said, "Ashes and Elena didn't make it."

"That... fool?" Nightingale said, aghast, and then turned away.

"Lightning told me that Ashes became Transcendent near the end of the fight and sacrificed herself to kill the demon. Nothing was left behind from the battle except for the melted remains of Ashes' sword," Roland continued slowly.

Roland had predicted the failure of the ambush when he had seen the siege through the phantom instrument. Judging from the formation of the demons, it appeared they had been purposely waiting for the witches to take action. Unfortunately, he could

only have a glimpse of the battlefield through the screen. After the Special Unit had retreated to the west, he had lost track of the witches and thus been pacing up and down in his room with burning anxiety.

Roland had anticipated the worst scenario at that moment.

The actual outcome of the battle was much better than he had thought.

Nevertheless, the casualties still gave him a leaden feeling in his stomach.

After all, he was the one who had approved this plan.

"Ashes was arrogant and very full of herself, but she never made any reckless decisions..." Nightingale remarked as she placed her hand gently on Roland's back. "The same goes for Elena. I believe that they knew this would eventually happen, so, you don't have to pin all the blame on yourself. I'm throwing the words you said to Leaf right back to you."

Roland nodded slowly a few times. He still did not understand how the demons had predicted their plan and why they had taken eliminating the witches precedence of over control of the Holy City of Taquila. Yet it had happened. As the leader of Graycastle and the united front, he should never show any signs of despondency to the public no matter how disheartening and painful the situation was.

How was he supposed to support someone more downcast than him if he were to let his emotions consume him?

For example, Tilly.

He did not know how to face her.

From what Leaf had told him, Tilly and Ashes had been much closer than he thought. Although Tilly was not completely devastated by the news and immediately came to help the wounded, the sparkles in her eyes had faded instantly when she

had heard about Ashes' death. According to Lightning's words, the radiance around Tilly had disappeared. Lightning had also forwarded Roland Ashes' last words, probably hoping that Roland could assuage Tilly's grief.

But comforting people was never one of his expertise.

He decided to take things slow.

On the same afternoon, the Seagull arrived at Neverwinter.

All the witches who sustained minor injuries returned from the battle, whereas those in critical condition were still remaining at the front, awaiting Nana's treatment.

Roland and the other Witch Union members greeted them at the airport.

Anna, Agatha, Molly, and Phyllis climbed down the jet bridge and hugged Scroll, Nightingale and Sharon, as well as the clerks of the Witch Union, including Ring, Grayrabbit and Pearl. At this moment, the war made everyone equal. There was no difference between combat and non-combat witches, new and Taquila witches, or witches and the common people.

Tilly was the last to get off the plane.

Roland walked up to her and stammered, "That..."

"Can I have a word with you in private, brother?" Tilly asked as she looked up at him.

...

He thus led Tilly to his office and closed the door behind them after Nightingale left the room on his orders.

"Alright, if you want to say something..." Roland broke off. As he turned around, he felt his chest suddenly constrict, and Tilly threw herself at him.

"Please, just stay there," Tilly choked while holding Roland tight, her voice quavered. "Let me hold you like this for a while, just a

while..."

Her voice trailed off into a sob, her fingers sinking into Roland's back deeply.

So that was why.

Like him, she was a leader; a leader of Sleeping Spell. Tilly did not have the liberty to show her emotions. It was indeed not an easy task to hold back her tears while inside, she was tormented by misery and agony of her loss.

Roland patted Tilly on the back and said, "You don't need to hold back anymore. Cry if you want. Nobody will hear..."

Tilly's tears then came flooding out her eyes.

The sobbing soon grew louder and louder and turned into a heartbreaking wail that Roland had never heard before. He had never seen Tilly so sad, not even when she had been bullied by her own brother when she had been little. It was an outpour of forlorn and despair from a person who had just lost that which was what the dearest to them.

Roland didn't know what to say, because no words could comfort her at the moment.

So he just stood there and waited.

...

Meanwhile at the frontline.

The tent flap was pulled back, and Shavi came in with a bowl of medicine in her hand.

"Do I have to drink that again?" Andrea mumbled. Her legs were completely bandaged and her face covered with medicinal cream. Although neither of these really helped heal her wounds, Andrea liked the soothing sensation on her skin. "I won't drink it without candies."

"How about... I ask for some from the field medics?" Shavi said

tentatively.

"Since when did the field medics have candies? This isn't Neverwinter. Whatever, help me up."

Andrea sat up, took the bowl, and emptied it down her throat.

"Aargh, is Nana still busy? How long do I have to wait before receiving treatment?"

"I asked her. She told me you need to wait for another three or four days. She said that some God's Punishment Witches were in worse conditions than you, and..."

"And what?"

Shavi muttered, "She said that your legs looked pretty bad but the injuries weren't fatal, so medication should help."

Andrea rolled her eyes and said, "I'm not that muscular monster. How can I heal myself up?"

Those words almost brought Shavi to tears.

"Sorry," Andrea mumbled, quickly turning her tactless comment into a cough. "Forget about it."

"No..." Shavi said while shaking her head. "You just reminded me of Ashes, so I couldn't help..."

"I look like her? What the — " Andrea broke off, frowning, as she realized that she had almost forgotten about her status as a noble. "Well... I feel a bit tired now. You go take a rest. Please tell Lightning and Maggie to bring some honey back next time they go on a patrol. At least that will make my life a lot easier."

"Okay, got it."

"Thanks."

Andrea, however, was still not able to restore her composure after Shavi departed.

"You wanted to save everyone? You even ended up becoming a

Transcendent. Did you think that you were a Queen of Starfall City of old?"

"Now you killed the Magic Slayer and met a heroic end, but..."

Andrea laid back down and buried her face in her hands.

"... Damn it, have you never thought about..."

"How I'm supposed to surpass you when you're now gone forever?"



# Chapter 1168: Recovery

---

Tilly cried for nearly an hour before she finally fell asleep. Roland put her on a couch, his cheeks and clothes smeared with Tilly's tears and snot. The latter was still shaking with sobs uncontrollably when Roland disengaged himself.

Tilly obviously did not wish the witches from Sleeping Spell to see her cry like this, so Roland asked Anna to bring Tilly to the master bedroom on the third floor of the castle.

Anna wiped Tilly's tear-streaked face as her breath gradually steadied as sleep broke over her. Apparently, she had burned out after working non-stop for weeks since Ashes' death. Anna gathered this was probably how Tilly coped with pain — by immersing herself in work and thereby temporarily detaching herself from the cruelty of reality.

"Please stay with her tonight," Roland said with a sigh. "She needs someone, and I trust that you're the best person to take care of her."

"Don't worry. I know how she feels and what to do," Anna answered while nodding. "What about you?"

"I could sleep in the Third Border City. I've been staying there for the past few days, so it doesn't matter to me," Roland replied. "Also, the witches there should be informed of the success of the 'Torch' project as well. Those ancient witches probably have been waiting for this news for a long time."

"OK," Anna said as she walked up to Roland and pressed a kiss to his cheek. "Although I don't want you to leave, it's important to let them know..."

"Sorry, you just came back from the front."

"Don't be silly, my king. We'll have plenty of time together in the future."

Just when Roland was about to leave, Anna stopped him again.

"By the way, bring Nightingale with you," she said in a serious tone. "You should never put yourself in danger."

While still being a little absorbed in Anna's clear blue eyes, Roland closed the door behind him.

...

Pasha greeted Roland and his guards at Third Border City immediately.

"Your Majesty, how did the war go? Any news from the front?"

She swayed her tentacles, looking unsettled.

With no intention of holding anything back from her, Roland said flatly, "We won. The demons on the plain were eradicated, and so was the Magic Slayer. The First Army seized Taquila."

Pasha instantly stopped swaying.

After a moment of silence, she asked, apparently thrilled, "Is this true? I apologize for my insolence, Your Majesty... I'm not questioning the credibility of your words, but I just don't know what to say. Could you tell me more about it?"

As a Senior Witch who had been living for more than 400 years, Pasha had developed the ability to remain unperturbed under any circumstances. It was Roland's first time seeing Pasha lose her composure. He replied, "Naturally, but..."

"Thank you, Your Majesty. I'll soon tell everyone the good news!" Pasha said and vanished from into the cave and from Roland's sight.

Momentarily stunned, Roland shook his head resignedly.

When Roland entered the underground hall, however, he not only saw Pasha, Alethea, and Celine but also all the other God's Punishment Witches gather about at the center of the hall. They were spread out in a line and were looking hopefully at him.

This made Roland feel it hard to tell them the whole story.

"Do what you can," Nightingale whispered to him. "Or tell Pasha mentally."

Roland nodded, took a step forward, and briefly talked about the war and its outcome. As he had not received a statistic report yet and Leaf had missed quite a few details when she had related the incident to him, Roland could not fully recount the story. Nevertheless, the God's Punishment Witches did not really care about the specifics anyway.

For those survivors who had been waiting for four centuries, all they needed to know was the final result.

The crowd erupted into a loud cheer after Roland finished his speech.

Many witches burst into tears and some whooped with laughter. All of them were thrilled by the news.

It was a day of euphoria for those witches as they had finally, for the first time in the past several hundred years, been freed of the oppression of the demons.

"Please forgive our insolence and rudeness in the past," Alethea said as she came up to Roland and bowed her main tentacle. "From today onwards, there's no need to keep a united front. We acknowledge you as the leader of Taquila and we trust you'll lead us to achieve our final goal."

Neither Pasha nor Celine spoke. Apparently, they also agreed.

This meant that Taquila had officially become an integral part of the Kingdom of Graycastle.

Roland gave a curt nod of agreement, and Alethea straightened up.

"Also, I need to tell you one more thing," Roland said and then told them about Elena's death.

"I see... So it was her," Pasha spoke slowly.

Roland was mildly surprised that the witches were not too upset about the news.

"You... already knew?" Roland asked, unable to help himself.

"No, we just anticipated that it would happen," Alethea said truthfully. "The demons saw through our ambush plan, which, back in the Union age, would normally leave us with no chance of survival. It's very fortunate that we only lost one member."

"You probably find it hard to understand, but we're used to death," Celine supplied the answer. "Every one of us volunteered to transfer our soul to the carrier and was on the brink of death once, not to mention numerous defeats during the past Battle of Divine Will. We're not afraid of death but a meaningless one."

"And Elena simply made a choice that every Taquila witch would make under that circumstance," Alethea said. "So, you don't have to be too sad about it."

Instead of providing solace to the witches, Roland became the one being comforted.

While being a little touched, he was at a loss for words.

"Of course, this doesn't mean we aren't sad for the loss. We simply learned how to control our emotions," Pasha said as she looked at the celebrating witches. "I'll tell them later. Right now, let them enjoy the celebration."

...

Five days later.

As the army gradually returned to Neverwinter, the news of the victory slowly infiltrated the city.

Although the civilians did not witness the actual war themselves like they had done during the battles against the demonic beasts and Duke Ryan, nor did they celebrate the victory at the time, they

gradually formulated a mental image of the enemy based on the various rumors circulated in the neighborhood. This particular enemy, unlike any demonic hybrids or knights, was ferocious, powerful, and dauntless. As many people had seen the attack of the Devilbeasts, it was further believed that this enemy was a demon from Hell.

Some details had even gone awry in the retelling, as the public was now quite positive that the demon was actually a 100-foot legendary monster that brought disasters and ejected fire. This imaginary demon thus soon became the most heated topic of discussion throughout the entire city.

The defeat of such an invincible monster significantly raised the morale of the masses. If the demon from Hell had failed to stop the First Army, then who could?

Meanwhile, the Graycastle Weekly further advertised the war by interviewing a large number of soldiers who had participated in the battle.

In a few days, Neverwinter witnessed a rapid increase in the number of people who applied to join the First Army, and the public set up a chant of "expand the territory of Graycastle for the king" throughout the city.

Nonetheless, the officers in Neverwinter knew very well what their real challenge was.

At the cemetery in the west of the city.

Since the first tombstone had been set up here five years ago during the Months of Demons, this old wasteland, which used to be overgrown with bushes and hedges, had now become a public cemetery carpeted with green grass.

426 new tombstones were added today.

Most of the tombs were empty, as they could not locate all the bodies of the killed. However, nobody felt that those soldiers were

abandoned. On each of the tombstones, there was the deceased soldier's name, rank, and feats.

Elena's and Ashes' tombs were among them.

They looked identical to all the other tombstones except that there was a half-melted sword in front of Ashes' tomb.

"Salute!" Iron Axe shouted while raising his hand.

Then all the officers administered a military salute, most of whom had a much higher rank than ordinary soldiers.

It was not only a memorial but also a reminder.

It reminded them that there was still a long way to go before the Battle of Divine Will ended.

After the funeral, Roland summoned Barov and said, "Ask all the ministers to come here. I have new tasks for them."

# Chapter 1169: A Parliament of Holy See

---

The rush of the waves from the Realm of Mind gradually faded, and Hackzord opened its eyes.

It saw a round hall, below which lay the tranquil sea of fog, and the ceiling of the hall was out of its sight. Nine seats of different sizes were suspended in the air and were along the steep stone wall. In the middle of the circle stood a giant Birth Tower. However, unlike a real High Tower, this Birth Tower was plastered with eyes the size of a junior demon.

This was the realm created by the king.

The "Presiding Holy See".

Although it was not its first time visiting here, it still felt somewhat restless and uncomfortable. Unlike a dream or ordinary mental communication, the communication that occurred in this hall, which was located in the middle of the Realm of Mind, was real. If it fell in the sea of fog or was under an attack, it would truly get injured.

In contrast to the chaos outside, the hall was strictly in order.

The king ruled the Holy See.

Once someone entered the Presiding Holy See, it would be at the mercy of the king.

Nevertheless, Hackzord was confident in its absolute loyalty to the king. It could easily suppress its instinctive revolt. Only savage beasts would find it difficult to control their instincts.

"The Sky Lord is at your service," Hackzord swept a bow at the High Tower in the center.

One of the eyes on the tower opened but immediately closed again. It said, "Please wait."

"Yes."

Presently, the seats were gradually filled.

The shadows occupying the seats were blurry, but Hackzord managed to make out who they were. The one whose armor was ornamented with various weapons, as giant as a small mountain, was the "Bloody Conqueror", the one wearing distorted clothes and masks was the "Resentful Heart". Very few could distinguish these prominent figures, because it depended on how well one understood the Origin of Magic.

When the last seat was occupied, the conference began.

The king materialized in front of all the lords, and half of the eyes on the Birth Tower slowly opened as well.

"You all probably know why I summoned you here. I believe everyone has the same question as me. Several days ago, one person upgraded and reached the Realm of Mind. The upgrade created a commotion there but soon, this particular individual became unresponsive," the king broke off and turned to the Sky Lord. "The one who created this commotion was Ursrook, the commander of the advanced troops of the Western Front. Hackzord, what in the world happened in the west?"

Hackzord felt nervous. It had expected the king to ask it this question. Disturbance of the Realm of Mind indicated that this individual must have achieved a relatively high realm, and all the lords would be able to sense such a remarkable improvement. As the battle in the Sky-sea Realm became increasingly fierce, one more lord meant a bigger chance to win. However, things suddenly took a turn for the worse. To everybody's consternation, this new lord simply left its mark in the realm and vanished into thin air. It was their first time over the past several hundred years seeing a lord die right after its upgrade.

In fact, Hackzord had received the news of their defeat in the west not long after Ursrook's upgrade, along with a letter written by Ursrook itself. Hackzord was so outraged by the content of the



letter that it wanted to drill a hole in Ursrook's skull to see what had made it act so recklessly!

When the king raised the question, Hackzord hesitated for a moment but finally decided to disclose the truth concerning the battle.

As Hackzord had expected, the hall erupted into a loud murmur of jeers, gasps, and exclamations.

"Huh? Did I just hear that right?" the "Bloody Conqueror" sneered predictably. "Your subordinate knowingly made a bad decision and sent all the troops to the Fertile Plains for slaughter? What did you call that guy earlier? A genius commander?"

Hackzord knew that the Blood Conqueror, as the commander at the Sky-sea Realm, always held a grudge against Ursrook. Fearing that Ursrook's upgrade would threaten its status, the Blood Conqueror would naturally seek every opportunity to attack Ursrook.

"I don't really care about junior demons and Spider Demons, but the Sky Lord should have known how precious those symbiotic demons are," the "Mask", who was responsible for developing symbiotic demons commented enigmatically. "If we successfully seized Taquila, the City of Falling Star and Arrieta, that would have been a different story because the God's Stone mines there could provide us with supplies. However, we now not only lost those mines but also the symbiotic."

"I'm shocked that we lost to those low lives, and I believe your lordship should, more or less, take some responsibility."

"I think we overestimated this so-called genius. He's just barely above average."

"Not all the upgraded could open the gate, otherwise there would have been more than nine lords sitting here. Plus, its enemy was a Transcendent."

"So what? This isn't 400 years ago anymore. Do you think dying together with a Transcendent is something that we should boast about?"

Hackzord's face clouded over as it listened to all the sniding comments. Although it did not really understand Ursrook, Ursrook had been one of its favorites. As a lord, it could not tolerate any attacks toward its old commander.

Just at that moment, the king interrupted the discussion and silenced everyone. "Enough, I just want to know if this would affect our plan!"

Hackzord immediately concentrated its mind and replied, "No, of course not. We have many other plans. Taquila isn't our priority. I assure you that we'll tread on men's territory as planned."

"Then keep your word," the king said, his voice lower.

"But..." the Sky Lord said hesitantly. "But I need to request for more troops. According to Ursrook, we need ten times the troops we have now to win this battle." After an internal struggle, Hackzord decided to disclose the content of Ursrook's letter. It did not know why it reached such a conclusion, probably because of the trust it had put in Ursrook or because of the horrific prediction Ursrook had made. Constantly, a voice in its head pressed Hackzord to tell the truth.

"Ten times?" the "Blood Conqueror" bellowed. "What are you joking about? We can barely cope with the battle at the Sky-sea Realm, and you still request for more? I won't give you anything!"

"What did Ursrook say?" the king asked heavily.

"When he wrote this letter, the advanced troops had not fought human beings yet. Ursrook insisted in staying at Taquila under the pretext that it wanted to find out men's weakness. If the plan worked, we would have been able to significantly weaken humans. Then, we should send more troops and exterminate the entire

human race."

"Was that a prophecy?" someone jeered. "I wonder if Ursrook predicted its own death."

"..." Hackzord nodded after a moment of silence. "Yes, it did."

A strained silence suddenly fell on the hall.

The lords exchanged looks, and the atmosphere became heavy.

The king spoke, "What did Ursrook say?"

The Sky Lord heaved a deep sigh and replied, "If it fails to survive, we should treat human beings as equals and exercise all our strength to annihilate them!"

# Chapter 1170: A Shocking Statement

---

The hall was stirred.

"All our strength?" the Blood Conqueror echoed coldly. "What do you mean by 'all our strength'?"

"Literal meaning," Hackzord replied lazily. "Abandon the cities where we've exploited all the God Stone mines and half of the continent to the Sky-sea Realm. Direct all our forces to the Land of Dawn. I mean all, including old and new troops, until the human race is wiped off the face of this planet."

"Stop, you insolent brute!"

"Are you crazy?"

"Then where should the millions of residents in those cities go?"

"Although Ursrook didn't explicitly say that in its letter, I believe they should be relocated to the Fertile Plains. It's a vast land that'll be large enough to accommodate these migrants," the Sky Lord answered.

"We aren't going to have a mass relocation," the Mask snorted while bursting into a furious laugh. "That'll be suicidal if we don't move the Birth Tower along with them. Plus, we only have one chance to erect the new tower after the arrival of the Bloody Moon. We could have built the tower in Taquila, but your genius commander lost the entire Fertile Plains. Isn't it too late now to talk about relocation?"

Hackzord fought down its urge to retort. As Ursrook had had limited forces at its command, and the king had refused to send more reinforcements, it had thus left Ursrook no choice but to abandon Taquila. However, Hackzord managed to suppress its resentment toward the king and remained expressionless.

It had to discipline its mind.

"We have alternatives," Hackzord said. "For example, we could use the Deity of Gods — "

"Absolutely not!," the Bloody Conqueror cut across Hackzord rather fiercely. "That's our only hope to repel the enemy at the Sky-sea Realm. How could we waste it on those low lives? Stop talking nonsense!"

"The Deity of Gods is our ultimate weapon," the king said. "It's an essential part of our operation plan, and nobody could ever change that, not even a new lord. That's settled."

The king made the final verdict.

Hackzord was profoundly relieved. In fact, it also felt that Ursrook's statement was a little too audacious. If Hackzord had had a choice, it would have rather kept the contents of the letter to itself.

Anyway, it had fulfilled its duty to the king.

"Also, I find it absurd to increase the force by ten times..."

Just when the Bloody Conqueror was about to pursue the argument, someone interrupted it.

"I actually think we should take Ursrook's warning a little more seriously," the voice said mildly, which startled everyone. It was the guardian of the king's city, the "Silent Disaster". As a lord, it rarely spoke on a meeting. Like its name suggested, the Silent Disaster had a taciturn character.

As the most powerful lord among the nine, the Silent Disaster despised the Mask and the Resentful Heart who had to rely on clothes to disguise their weaknesses. As for the Silent Disaster itself, it wore a gleamy black armor every day, its face completely masked by the visor, as though it did not care about its personal image, nor did it feel that the armor was uncomfortable to wear.

"And your reasoning?" the king asked curtly.

"Possibly... there are some other legacy shards unknown to us in this world."

There was another murmur that swept over the hall. It was louder than the one after they had heard Ursrook's final words.

"How is that possible? There are only four shards in total. Don't we find shards based on their shapes."

"Do you think that human beings upgraded by some unknown means so we'll have to put all our strength into the battle against them?"

"Where did you get that information?"

The people on the floor raised various questions.

"No, I don't have evidence. It's simply my own speculation," the Silent Disaster drawled. "I saw something... incomprehensible in the Divine Land once."

"Can you tell us what you saw?" the king asked, half of his eyes resting upon it.

The Silent Disaster shook its head and said, "It's indescribable. Please take a look at my memory." With these words, it bowed its head.

"So..." All of the king's eyes snapped open! In an instant, a chill stole through Hackzord that made it shudder uncontrollably. Its instinctive revolt reached its peak.

The injection of another individual's thoughts made Hackzord shift in its seat uncomfortably.

But it had to be absolutely loyal to the king.

The Sky Lord thus suppressed its feeling and offered to connect.

Then, eerie images streamed into it and filled its heart with fears that chilled it to the bone. Among those images, Hackzord, dimly, spied a man, standing with an air of detachment not far away. This man seemed to be enjoying watching it struggle. Hackzord knew

that this was not an illusion. Black tentacles that represented corruption were now rushing to attack it in a frenzy. If Hackzord did not leave now, it would soon drown in the Realm of Mind!

So Hackzord fled. During the escape, it broke one of the armrests of its chair.

The next moment, Hackzord woke up with a start and felt a chill running down its spine. The other lords also gasped and panted, obviously sharing the same feeling as Hackzord.

Now, everyone understood what the Silent Disaster had meant.

It was a well-known fact that legacy shards were connected with each other. When they communicated through the shards, there was a price they had to pay. Generally speaking, the price for the party who knew less about the Realm of Mind would be higher. They would not have been that surprised had this person in the Divine Land been a witch, as witches rarely visited the Realm of Mind voluntarily. They merely trespassed into the Realm of Mind every now and then, which did not really mean anything.

However, this person was a male.

According to the history of humans in the past thousand years, males had never displayed signs of magic.

There was no plausible explanation to this phenomenon except that human beings had upgraded.

It wasn't until then that Hackzord understood why the Silent Disaster had not shared this incident earlier. Nobody would like to admit that a low life had made it jump off the chair.

Hackzord wondered whether the Silent Disaster flushed underneath its helmet.

It appeared that its armor was not completely useless.

Was that the real reason it requested to resign from its guardian position?

Presently, one lord turned to Hackzord and asked, "Your lordship, did you also — "

"No, I only went to the Divine Land a few times, and I didn't see anything strange there," Hackzord cut that lord off while holding its chest a little higher. "If I did, I would have reported to the king immediately. I believe things would have been very different if it were me, based on my understanding of the Realm of Mind."

With these words, Hackzord darted a cold glance at the Silent Disaster.

"Interesting." Just then, a bright, silvery voice joined the conversation.

The "Nightmare" sitting at the end of the table, wearing a white robe, finally opened its third eye and broke the silence it had managed to keep since the beginning of the meeting.



# Chapter 1171: The Double Plan

---

Everyone rested their eyes on the Nightmare.

So did Hackzord.

The Nightmare Lord, Valkries, was the most special lord out of the nine lords. As the very first lord, it had led most of the lords on the floor to their upgrades. During the first Battle of Divine Will, it had established a close relationship with human beings, and it was even rumored that there were still some believers in human cities. Although the Nightmare was not the strongest lord, it was powerful enough to alter its physical appearance. However, it seemed to prefer the look after its upgrade — blue skinned, with a horn sprouting from its head, and a third eye on its forehead.

Although the Nightmare did not look remotely human, its fashion style and act of demeanor were quite manlike, and it was also the first lord who had learned to speak the human language.

In other words, the Nightmare was the complete opposite of the Silent Disaster. Its sheer, delicate white robe displayed every single thread of fabric and afforded the Nightmare a sense of aloofness that separated it from the rest of them.

The Nightmare looked relaxed and indifferent, but Hackzord knew its understanding of the Realm of Mind was astoundingly profound.

Hackzord would not have complained about anything had the Nightmare Lord been startled earlier.

In fact, it was the only lord that Hackzord failed to understand.

If any of the other lords had seated themselves so unceremoniously like the Nightmare, Hackzord would have doubted its loyalty.

Surprisingly, the king also appeared to be perfectly fine with the Nightmare's attitude.

"Well, what did you find?"

"I'm just wondering if there's such a possibility," Valkries said as it straightened up. "Whether there's an upgrade method unknown to us or not, let's just suppose that a male human possessed an ability like a witch, then this ability must have a lot to do with the Realm of Mind. Otherwise, the Silent Lord wouldn't have been so petrified."

A red fleck glimmered underneath the Silent Disaster's helmet. It said, "I've been guarding the legacy shard for nearly 200 years and have seen many humans. Most of them either fled or drowned. Only one person I met two years ago managed to confront me, but she was a woman."

"Witches could possibly achieve that, but I don't really care about that person's gender. I'm actually more concerned about the ability itself. Perhaps, this man hasn't even noticed that he's already powerful enough to leave a mark in the Realm of Mind."

"I agree with you," Hackzord rejoined. After all, the Realm of Mind was one of its expertises. "But I don't really see the point here. The Realm of Mind is vast. It would be almost impossible to find a mark left by a specific individual."

"Perhaps," Valkries neither approved nor denied. "But I still want to give it a shot, using the connection between the different legacy shards. What do you think?"

Mildy taken aback, Hackzord asked, "Have you already learned to sense the connection between the shards?"

The defeat of the underground civilization significantly increased the magic power of the entire race. They were thus able to sense the Birth Towers. Gradually, they realized that both the communication with the Birth Tower and the legacy shards had to be completed through the Realm of Mind. Therefore, in theory, they could always search along the communication line for what was connected on the other end.

Nevertheless, this was simply a theory. The Realm of Mind was chaotic and random like the whirling sea. It was extremely hard to look for a thin thread hidden underneath the surface of the water. The deeper this thin thread was, the more susceptible it was to the influences of the currents. Hackzord could barely maintain its position in the Realm, let alone looking for a faintly discernible "connection line".

It had never thought of using this method.

Did Valkries already surpass it in the understanding of the Origin of Magic?

"Maybe," Valkries answered leisurely. "But I won't know until I try it out. If I could find the mark left by that man, we could probably know the answer."

Hackzord thought the mark would not be much of help. The mind was complicated. Even for the mind of someone of the same race, they had to do a lot of research, feel, and make numerous deductions to learn the truth, not to mention that they were now going to search for the mind of a person of another race. Forcing its way into someone's mind would lead to madness and disorder. Hackzord wanted to talk sense into the Nightmare, but when it saw Valkries' white robe, his words somehow rested on the tip of its tongue.

Perhaps, the Nightmare Lord did have some feasible way to achieve this.

"The Sky Lord is now guarding the legacy shards. Ask him if you want to try," said the king.

"As you command," Valkries said while placing its hand on its chest. "However, it should be noted that there's no guarantee that we could find the answer before human beings upgrade. There are many variables, and the search requires a lot of time. There's a possibility that the upgrade of human race would cause substantial damage to us. I believe the Sky Lord has a Plan B after we lose

Taquila, right? If Plan B fails again, everything we've done so far would be wasted."

"You're being too cautious..." the Blood Conqueror said gruffly.

"I held the upgrade ceremony for Ursrook. After it upgraded, it learned a lot about humans from me," Valkries said mildly as it closed its eyes again. "It was definitely gifted, and I don't think its warning is a word out of delirium. Therefore, I uphold its suggestion of sending more troops to the Fertile Plains."

"Seconded," the Silent Disaster rejoined.

The king lapsed into a short silence and looked toward the other commanders including the Bloody Conqueror. "Are you able to increase the forces by ten times to support the Sky Lord while maintaining the current defense?"

"Sire..."

"I'm asking whether you can or can't."

There was a brief silence in the hall.

To Hackzord's surprise, the Mask broke the silence. "Yes, sire, I can manage. As long as you could provide me with more resources for my research, I can develop more powerful, diverse symbiotic demons. They won't be restricted by their parents and will be much more powerful than junior demons. Ten times more powerful! More importantly, they'll not affect the battle at the front."

"But that'll consume many God's Stones," the Resentful Heart said apprehensively. "If we lose control, the consequences will be devastating."

"When we wipe out those low lives, we'll have plenty of God's Stones!"

"Are you sure you can make it in time?" the Bloody Conqueror retorted irritably.

The Mask paused for a second and said, "Well, it'll be a little difficult to provide so many symbiotic demons at a time, but I don't think human beings will react that fast. We may be able to vanquish them with just half of the suggested number. In that case, we could probably save half of our resources. It would be better than nothing..."

"Enough," the king interrupted the conversation. "Let's do what the Mask said. Anyway, we can't let human beings live on the Land of Dawn for another 400 years. We must take the entire continent after this Battle of Divine Will!"

"As you wish!" chorused all the lords as they bent their heads.

# Chapter 1172: A New Population Policy

---

In Neverwinter, Graycastle.

In the castle boardroom.

With the expansion of the Administrative Office, the meeting room became increasingly crowded. Many officials were sitting on benches behind their ministers and deputy ministers, whereas clerks and assistants were forced to stand flat against the wall. The hall was thus packed with around 200 people.

Roland thought it was now time to build a larger conference hall to accommodate these officials. He gathered that once the local officials came to the king's city to report their work, they would probably have to use the first floor of the castle to receive them.

He noted this idea down on a book and clapped his hands, and the meeting room instantly fell silent.

"I believe everyone has learned about the great success of the 'Torch' project that lasted for around 10 months. Now, we've eradicated the demons and expanded our territory to the Fertile Plains. From now on, instead of a deserted land full of traps and dangers, the area to the west of Neverwinter will provide us with resources and food!" Roland paused for a second and then said, "That's right. This land larger than the Four Kingdoms put together will be the land we'll dwell on for the next 100 years!"

The hall erupted into thunderous applause.

Territory expansion was viewed as the most important task for a king, and was also the fastest way for officials to gain a profit. Even civilians could benefit from the newly-acquired land, as this new land was several times the current territory of Graycastle.

"The 'Four Kingdoms' would probably become a part of history in a few years," Barov said jubilantly while stroking his beard. "The other three kingdoms are incomparable to Graycastle in strength

and power."

"Quite right. It would be hilarious if we continue to use the word 'the Four Great Kingdoms' to document our history."

"How about 'One Great and Three Small Kingdoms'?"

"A little bit too much of a mouthful. I would rather come up with a brand new name."

"I Agree. I trust that the word 'empire' would suit our current status."

The ministers were absorbed in this heated discussion.

Roland did not stop their argument but allowed them to savor the aftermath of the victory over the demons before he steered the subject back to business. "I hope it's our mutual understanding that this victory is just the beginning of the war! Although we drove the demons out of the Fertile Plains, it doesn't necessarily mean that they wouldn't come back. This peace is only temporary. The real threat is the Battle of Divine Will when the Bloody Moon appears. I believe our enemy will put all their efforts into fighting this battle. Therefore, we must be well-prepared!"

"In other words, we shouldn't slack off. Instead, we should work even harder. Do you understand?"

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

The crowd shouted together.

Roland surveyed the room and nodded at Nightingale next to him.

Nightingale turned around and pulled back the curtain on the wall.

A huge blackboard replaced the map of the Western Region, on which there was only one single word: people.

"This is what I want," Roland announced slowly.

Peace was restored in the Western Region. With the return of the army and the consolidation of the local administration in various municipalities, Graycastle citizens had become, unprecedentedly, united. Among all the plans Roland was about to implement, increasing the population became the most important one.

To expedite the implementation of this policy, he even placed a higher priority on this matter over the post-war analysis.

Without a doubt, the biggest problem for Neverwinter now was its small population.

Had the First Army had an armored unit during the "Torch" project, they could have easily repelled the demons that had ambushed the witches using the simplest infantry fighting vehicle.

Although it was not necessarily ideal to use the first generation of the piston engine to produce an infantry fighting vehicle, it was better than nothing.

Roland knew that the production rate in Neverwinter had reached its maximum.

The plants could yield no more steel.

The battle had cost them 90% of the shells accumulated over years in Neverwinter.

The railway, which meandered through the plain, had almost consumed all the steel they had.

Agatha now also felt it increasingly hard to catch up with the acid production in the plant.

The production of RPGs further exhausted the ammunition stockpile.

It was undeniable that they had reached dead ends in many areas.

Roland needed people to expand production.

He also needed people to work on new projects.



To put the plan into action, Roland needed even more people to coordinate with different departments.

The population of Neverwinter was currently increasing at a steady pace and had reached 200,000. Compared to other cities, this number was astronomical. It would probably take just another decade for Neverwinter to expand into a metropolis that housed one million residents.

Roland would have peacefully accepted the victory had the demons not acted so unpredictably in the past war. In fact, as the reason for the demons' unexpected behavior still remained as a mystery, Roland felt a little uneasy about the outcome. He would rather see a fierce, bitter battle in Taquila between the First Army and the demons that lasted for over half a year and caused over half of the soldiers to be classified as casualties than the result he saw now.

He had planned to conduct a prolonged campaign.

But the demons had not let him do so.

The deviation from their original operation plan indicated some unforeseen changes had taken place. As the army returned to Neverwinter, Roland's fear of uncertainty grew, which urged him to speed up the process by taking some unusual measures.

"Your Majesty, the Administrative Office has been on top of that," Barov replied as he rose to his feet. "Based on the statistics, the city takes in immigrants every year. I believe in about five years, the number of the immigrants in the city will be doubled—"

"I can't wait another five years anymore," Roland interjected. "I wish to see this happen this year, and possibly more immigrants than what was initially planned, if possible."

Everybody gasped.

"200,000 a year? Your Majesty, I'm afraid that's impossible..." Barov said hesitantly. "Only a famine or a riot could bring in so

many people at a time."

"You were talking about the immigration under normal circumstances, but I'm intending to issue an administrative order. If we make relocation mandatory, it won't be very hard to reach this target. In short, this long-term plan can be divided into three parts."

Roland stuck out three fingers.

"Which are relocation, cross-border recruitment, and more births. These are what you should work on next."

# Chapter 1173: I Want All of Them

---

"I'm only giving you the basic frame of this project. You have to figure out how to implement the policy and coordinate with the other departments yourself. Barov Mons should be supervising the whole project."

"As you command," Barov responded while clapping his hand over his chest.

Roland nodded in satisfaction. After years of training, Barov had learned to obey his order without questioning his authority no matter how unreasonable it seemed to be.

The close and intertwined relationship between each department within the Administrative Office enabled Barov to allocate resources for a big project like this.

"Now, listen carefully," Roland said as he instructed Nightingale to stick a sheet of white cloth to the blackboard. "First is the migration within the Kingdom of Graycastle..."

"Wow..." the crowd exclaimed involuntarily when they saw the content on the canvas.

On the canvas were the several main features of this policy, supplemented with clear instructions in both text and picture formats. This was actually a very crude, primitive powerpoint created by Soraya. As a former engineering student, Roland believed that making slides was one of the basic skills to negotiate with employers. Compared to a lengthy, dry speech, slides would obviously be more visually appealing to audience.

The population structure in Graycastle reflected how manpower was distributed in this particular age. Nobles of a higher rank, after becoming a lord, built their own cities and distributed their lands to their subordinates. With the increase in the population and the accumulation of wealth, big cities gradually found it

increasingly difficult to sustain themselves. Subsequently, some city residents moved out to surrounding villages to continue to support those big cities.

As a consequence, cities ceased to expand, creating a huge income gap between the nobles and civilians. Although these large cities appeared to be prosperous and boisterous at the first glance, the population of the surrounding towns and villages was actually much bigger than that of the city they were supporting.

However, Roland knew the fundamental reason for this phenomenon was low productivity. Due to low productivity, civilians were bound by the lands they owned. For the rest of their life, they had no choice but to work laboriously in their fields to support the extravagant lifestyle of the nobles, with little they could keep to themselves.

During the previous years when Roland had been recruiting refugees, the Administrative Office had paid special attention to the change in the local demographic and made a rough estimate. They concluded that the population of Graycastle should be between two million to four million. The wars waged by the second prince and Princess Garcia, and the plague spread by the church had caused a loss of 500,000 to 600,000 in the population and also razed the Eagle City in the Southern Territory and Valencia in the Eastern Region to the ground. Nevertheless, there were still quite a considerable number of people scattered around Graycastle, and only a very small portion of them had chosen to settle down in the Western Region.

But now, Roland was determined to force those people to move here.

It was predicted that they would soon harvest a great quantity of wheat grown from Golden Twos within a month. Meanwhile, high-yield cotton had also been widely grown in the Port of Clearwater. It would not be long before they could supply fabric to people in the entire kingdom. Currently, big cities no longer had to

rely on manpower to sustain themselves, for one person could yield products 10 or 20 times they used to.

Further, Roland had, technically, unified Graycastle on an administrative level, as all the power that used to belong to local lords was now held by the central government. The lords would have to obey the orders issued by secondary administrative bodies.

The unification of the kingdom thus provided an excellent opportunity to implement his new migration policy.

The so-called migration equality referred to the equal treatment of any or all citizens' rights to migrate their family members. It was an effective way to reduce conflicts that the mandatory migration policy might spark among the public.

For example, a migrant who used to have two acres of land would be granted the same amount of land by the Administrative Office after he moved to Neverwinter. This strategy would not only expedite the development of the deserted land in the northwest but would also effectively solve the labor shortage problem in Neverwinter.

However, Roland foresaw it was not going to be a pleasant process to drive people out of their native towns to a completely foreign city.

To persuade people to abandon their native land and work in a plant would need a stronger reason than the simple explanation of "emancipation". Historically, the road migrants had trodden on was never unstained with the blood of uncooperative protestors. The government had the nasty tradition of stripping villagers of their properties through illegal purchase and occupation. Some countries even had a history of threatening unemployed refugees to work in factories via legislation and punishments.

Although Roland did not intend anything like this to happen and was actually planning to provide social assistance to migrants, he was determined to restructure the demographic.

He knew what he was doing.

The second requirement was cross-border recruitment, which was basically the same as mandatory migration only that the targetted demographic was residents living beyond Graycastle.

Unlike the Kingdom of Dawn that survived the war, both the Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart lost their sovereigns after the church's invasion. According to Hill, these two kingdoms had not fully recovered yet. All the lords claimed that they were the blood of the royal families, and nobody seemed to be able to persuade the others.

Given that, it was out of the question to establish a puppet government like Roland had done to the Kingdom of Dawn.

"Do you mean... that we should send the First Army?" Barov blurted out as he saw a new sheet was put onto the board.

"Do you think that the nobles will allow us to take away their properties while doing nothing?" Roland said matter-of-factly as he sipped his tea. "They care about nothing but power, wealth and more lands. They don't give a damn about the demons or the Battle of Divine Will. Of course, we still need to reason with them first. As for whether they accept it or not, that's another story."

"I'll let them yield, Your Majesty," Iron Axe said sternly.

Cross-border recruitment would definitely be more savage than mandatory domestic migration. Without Golden Twos, many civilians would have to relocate to other cities. The loss of population and food would then lead to the destruction of the entire urban ecosystem. It was, therefore, another form of war, only that the loss would be relatively small compared to an aggressive one.

The First Army was the key to this plan.

The population of the Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart was around 3 million. Except for those killed in the

battles against the church, they could provide Neverwinter 1,500,000 immigrants. The relocation might take several years but it would also be the fastest way to increase the population. That was why Roland asked Barov to double the population within a year, or even within half a year.

"Your Majesty, do you have any requirements for those immigrants?" Barov asked. "Like they have to be skilled workers, farmers or literates?"

Roland had screened refugees before, but at that time, due to limited resources, he had not had the liberty to take in all of them. However, things were quite different now.

"No," Roland answered as he clenched his fist. "I want all of them."

"I... I see," Barov said while mopping his sweat-dampened forehead.

"Last but not least," Roland continued as he instructed Nightingale to show the last slide. "The Administrative Office shall encourage births through advertisement, tax reduction and rewards. Although compared to the previous two policies, you won't be able to immediately see the result of this one. However, it's going to be the most important policy in the future."

Roland paused for a second and then said smilingly to his audience, "For this last policy, I hope everyone in this room could set a good example for the public."

# Chapter 1174: A Permanent Currency Solution

---

Somebody in the room sniggered.

With the rapid expansion of the Administrative Office and the establishment of a graduation exam system, the average age of governmental officials reduced by years. Since youths were naturally more willing to accept and learn new things than old people, it was common for a young man to finish school at the age of 20 and elevate himself to a key position in the government at the age of 25.

In fact, Roland saw many young officials in the conference hall.

He curled up his lips as he saw some new officials flush fugitively and lower their heads.

Although these young men were relatively inexperienced compared to the old generation, they injected hopes and energies into the institution, which were essential for a newly-established governmental body.

"Anyway, you all need to do your best to increase the population of Neverwinter. Obviously, we'll need more residential buildings and facilities to accommodate these new residents. Doubling the population isn't our ultimate goal, as I'm not going to set a target for this project. All you should know is that the more, the better. Everyone is obligated to make a contribution." Roland concluded after the laughter died down, "To make it easy to memorize, let's round up the number and call this project the 'Project of A Million'."

"Yes, Your Majesty!"

The officials all clapped their hands over their chests.

The next few executive orders were all supplementary orders to the Project of A Million, such as the exploitation of the resources



underneath the Fertile Plains, the establishment of day schools and specialized ones, as well as the further regulation of universal education. Roland also intended to outsource medical professionals from the public instead of recruiting from the army while setting up clinics in various neighborhoods to reduce the pressure of the hospital. Correspondingly, the Ministry of Education should add another subject to the middle school curriculum, medical science, and train semi-professionals working at the field medics using the textbooks collected from the Dream World.

It would not be very easy to expand a city with a population of 200,000 into one with a population of 400,000 or even a million. With the increase in the population, they would, inevitably, had to improve the infrastructure of the city to prevent pollution from waste water and human excreta. The epidemic prevention work would also become more demanding due to the dense population. Although Lily could help with disease control, Roland still had to find a way to establish a monitoring and prevention system.

Education was another key to further development. Illerate population would only impose a huge burden on the system as opposed to providing assistance to the industrialization.

That was why Roland only laid out the basic frame of the plan because he knew a large city with a population of over a million would not instantly invent itself just after one meeting. The Administrative Office had to figure out how to execute the plan themselves through constant exploration and practices.

While everyone was excited about the future of Neverwinter, Barov suddenly asked, "Your Majesty, are you planning to send all these people to the plants?"

Roland said with a nod, "Or the construction team, the First Army or the laboratory. Anywhere that needs people."

"But the Administrative Office probably isn't financially capable of supporting these people." Barov said hesitantly, "The main

revenue of the Administrative Office comes from the sale of Chaos Drinks, perfumes and steam engines. You know that the Joint Chamber of Commerce pays us the bill for the steam engines every three to six months. However, we have to pay subjects their salaries every month, which was around 80,000 gold royals in total. There's no need to worry about any financial problems at the moment because we earn much more than we pay out. However, if the number of the subjects doubles, I'm afraid..."

"You're worried that if the payment is delayed for a few months, the municipality won't be able to pay their people, right?" Roland asked with some interest, his eyebrows raised. He was very pleased that Barov, the former assistant to the Treasurer, quickly foresaw a potential financial crisis.

"Exactly," Barov said as he wrote frantically on his notebook. "As salaries increase annually, the expenses on payroll will only grow higher every year. However, the annual production of Chaos Drinks won't change much, and with the residents in the Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart swarming into Neverwinter, they'll no longer need to purchase products from here. I'm afraid that the treasury of the Administrative Office will soon be exhausted when our revenue rapidly decreases. I made a rough estimate here. If we take in more than 100,000 people each year, our financial risk will increase by 30%, unless you could find some other sources of revenue..."

Nightingale's eyes instantly glistened. She whispered to Roland, "There's an unexploited gold mine within the domain of our family."

Roland replied in amusement, "I'm not that desperate yet."

"Who cares? Use it if you like."

"Well... don't worry, I'll use it when it's absolutely necessary, but not now," Roland whispered back, then turned to Barov and said, "I've thought of that, and I find you a solution that could solve all

the problems you're worried about."

"An ultimate solution?" Barov said, a little taken aback.

"Correct. I see that the cause of these problems is insufficient funds. If we could generate indefinite revenues, there won't be any problems."

Printing notes would be the fastest way to get rich.

When the industrialization of a city reached a certain point, the current monetary system that was heavily based on precious metal currency would inevitably cease to work. Due to the rapid development of technologies, eventually commodities whose values were much more than precious metal itself would emerge. When customers could no longer provide enough precious metal currencies to pay for the values of those commodities, the monetary system would automatically collapse.

However, credit currency did not have such a problem.

Roland had conducted a pilot project before by distributing the witches nominal notes. He noticed these notes were extremely hard to counterfeit because they were printed in Darkcloud's ink, pressed with Anna's moulds and attached with an anti-forgery mark made out of the rubber worm's slime.

Otherwise, the witches would have forged notes on their own to snap up the Chaos Drinks in the castle convenience store.

Further, Neverwinter now had the capability to distribute credit currency.

Roland had planned to discuss the details about the currency format, currency value, and rules pertaining to currency exchange with Barov after he drafted a basic guideline. However, since Barov had raised this question, he would not mind slipping some information.

While Roland was explaining the principle of credit currency to a group of bemused, flabberghasted ministers, the door of the

conference hall was flung open and Phyllis burst in.

"Your Majesty, we made a new discovery. Pasha wishes you and your party to come down to the underground hall immediately."

"That urgent?"

"Yes," Phyllis confirmed while knitting her brows. "We've already deciphered the Magic Slayer... no, the demon lord, Ursrook's letter!"

# Chapter 1175: Ursrook's Letter

---

In the central hall of the Third Border City.

Roland heard a hysterical shriek as he led his ministers off the underground corridor to the hall.

"What's that?" Wendy asked in surprise.

"Kabradhabi's wailing," Phyllis, who led the way, replied. "He broke down after hearing Ursrook's defeat. Not only did he lose his composure but he also made several attempts to commit suicide as well. It took us a while to sedate it."

"I suddenly feel that it might be a better idea to let it live," Tilly rejoined coldly.

"He must live," Phyllis said while nodding vigorously. "The encrypted letter written by Ursrook provides us an excellent opportunity to get a more profound understanding of our enemy. We could probably even know how they mastered our language, which is something the Union yearned but failed to do."

"I can't believe that Kabradhabi would agree to cooperate," Nightingale remarked.

"No, it didn't. It's a little complicated to explain the whole thing. You'll see when you meet it."

Roland and his party came to a halt before an interrogation stand, where the Senior Demon, who took the form of a God's Punishment Warrior, was tethered to a metal post, with a tube inserted into its abdomen. Its eyelids were forced open, before which was a sheet of paper with foreign characters on it.

"So, this is the encrypted letter reconstructed by Summer?" Wendy asked.

"Yes. Maggie spotted it in midair, otherwise we would have probably missed it," answered Agatha, who looked a little pale and

weary. There were dark signs of sleeplessness beneath her eyes.

After the war ended, Roland immediately sent the Neverwinter Detective Group to the front to help the army collect information that was typically hard to obtain by ordinary means. Roland believed that the letter, which accidentally slipped out, would be more reliable than the information the demons deliberately divulged to humans.

Considering that Summer's magic power was limited, initially they had just planned to reconstruct the battle between the ambush unit and the demons, and how the Magic Slayer had deceived Sylvie and set up his counter ambush.

But in reality, Roland saw more than he had expected.

He did not expect to see Ursrook, perched on the giant skeleton, write this letter in the golden rays of sunset.

Summer had faithfully reconstructed this particular scene.

"Aaaaaaargh!" Kabradhabi howled while wriggling, making a desperate attempt to avert its eyes.

Agatha nodded at Breeze who stamped her foot, and the Senior Demon instantly fell silent.

"I see. You're asking Breeze to manipulate it into reading the encrypted letter," Nightingale commented with a look of dawning comprehension.

"And then we'll ask Ms. Camilla to channel it to see how it'll react to the letter," Celine added. "Although it tried to fake its reaction, we could still distinguish real, spontaneous reactions from fake ones by constantly changing the content of the letter. We actually got this idea from Your Majesty."

"From me?" Roland asked in bewilderment.

"In the intermediate biology textbook, you mentioned that a dog will salivate when being presented with food. This type of

unconditioned response applies to all creatures, including demons."

"We thus pieced the information in its head together and deciphered the content of the letter using a similar approach. Thanks to Ms. Camilla's assistance, we were able to obtain the intelligence rather quickly." With these words, Celine waved her main tentacle at Camilla in gratitude.

"I'm just hoping... hoping that I could help Lady Tilly," Camilla said while biting her lip, a little embarrassed.

That was the beauty of witches' abilities. Although every witch had her own limitation, each of them was irreplaceable. Some ability was so rare that it might take more than several hundred years to see a witch awaken with such an ability. Perhaps there had been witches with abilities similar to Camilla Dary's during the past two Battles of Divine Will, but unfortunately, they had not managed to survive the day when human beings captured a real Senior Demon.

That was probably why Ursrook had been so keen on the elimination of the witches. However, were Ashes, Sylvies and the other witches really more important for the demons than Taquila? The demons, after all, needed God's Stones to erect the Obelisk. Once they seized Taquila, the Red Mist would pervade the Impassable Mountain Range. By that time, demonic beasts would be able to easily climb over the mountains and invaded the interior of the Four Kingdoms. It would then be almost impossible for human beings to drive the demons out of the Fertile Plains.

Both the General Staff and the ancient witches had believed that Taquila was the demons' top priority.

Why was the reality so different from their prediction. Perhaps, the letter would give them some clues.

"So, tell me about the content of the letter you have deciphered," said Roland slowly.

...

As all the sentences had been broken down into short phrases for interpretation, some of the paragraphs did not sound very articulate. Nevertheless, they could still roughly make out what the letter said. As Celine slowly transmitted pieces of information, Roland suddenly had a strange feeling that Celine was whispering to him.

"Dear Sky Lord, the final settlement is around the corner. I'm well prepared, not only for the battle but also for myself."

"In the past one month, I heard... the summon numerous times. It is such a strong sign that I'm confident that I'll upgrade in this upcoming battle..."

"I know my action will subject you to criticism, but I don't think it'll affect your plan for the Western Front."

"If I succeed, our enemy will lose their only means of... and we'll, once again, be able to control the pace of the battle."

"... Send troops ten times what we have now, and human beings won't stand a chance..."

"Nevertheless, I cannot guarantee our victory at this moment. If I fail..."

"Please treat humans as equal and annihilate them with all our strength. If necessary, we might even have to abandon the Fathomless Abyss."

"... As long as we could obtain their legacy shard, there will still be a ray of hope to crush the Sky-sea Realm."

"Finally, please send my regards to the king and the Nightmare Lord."

Roland felt his back was covered with a sheen of cold sweat after he read Ursrook's letter.

He now understood why Phyllis looked so anxious.



Ursrook had definitely failed his mission. He had not only failed to annihilate the ambush unit but also got himself killed in the end.

This meant that the demons would probably adopt the second proposal on the letter.

Although there were missing words here and there, Roland could still tell that Ursrook had been advising his kind to abandon their battle against the Sky-sea Realm and put all their efforts into the eradication of the human race.

What the hell?

A leaden feeling suddenly stole through Roland. This was probably the worst news he had ever received since the war.

"We probably have to put aside the development plan for the Fertile Plains now," Wendy muttered.

"If the demons dedicate themselves to killing us, it'll be too dangerous to build the residential area outside the defensive line."

"But what about the Red Mist?"

"The Demons could establish the Obelisk in Starfall City."

"But then the Red Mist won't be able to permeate the entire Fertile Plains, and we could still have another 400 years of peace before the next Battle of Divine Will. It won't be very different than what we proposed earlier, right?"

"The difference is that the demons will go to all lengths to exterminate our kind."

"No..." Edith interrupted the heated discussion. "There's something wrong with this letter."

# Chapter 1176: A [Flaw]

---

Roland cast Edith a surprised glance.

After the miserable failure of the ambush tactic, some governmental officials criticized the judgement of the General Staff, and the Chief of General Staff, Edith Kant, naturally became the target of these unkind attacks. In addition to the Administrative Office, the Sleeping Spell also raised objections. Tilly waved these skeptical voices into silence immediately and thereby reduced the impact of this temporary outbreak of resentment to the minimum.

Edith had also requested for disciplinary action when she had come back from the front. However, Roland had declined her request and hushed up the whole thing.

Because he knew this was not Edith's fault.

On the contrary to a defeat, the "Torch" campaign was indeed a great success. They had slaughtered nearly 20,000 demons at the cost of only 500 casualties and recovered the Taquila Holy City lost to the demons hundreds of years ago. Undoubtedly this was a major victory.

Everybody knew how much the General Staff had done for the war.

In fact, Roland had discussed this matter with Tilly, Agatha and Alethea in private, and all of them believed the misjudgement was largely attributed to the unexpected behavior of the enemy. Even the Three Chiefs back in the Union would not have been able to predict that the demons would let the opportunity to take over the entire continent slip just because of a few witches.

Nevertheless, it was undeniable that Edith had indeed lost to Ursrook. Roland anticipated that she would succumb, for once, to despondence because of the scathing criticism, but to his great

consternation, Edith remained poised and confident as ever, and again, blurted out a completely different view.

"... What's wrong?"

"First is the last two sentences," Edith said while pacing up and down, her head hanging. "If he succeeds, the demons should increase their forces tenfold. Doesn't it sound strange? If the demons' ultimate goal was to wipe out the human race, then they should have taken Taquila more seriously. I understand that they're now struggling to deal with their enemy in the Sky-sea Realm, but they shouldn't have given up on Taquila completely either, for the letter suggests they should come back and eliminate us."

Momentarily stunned, Wendy asked, "It does sound strange. Why didn't they do that in the first place?"

"Because of the Red Mist?" Nightingale said tentatively while propping her chin on her hand.

"The demons aren't likely to send all their forces, but they could have increased the troops by ten times as long as they sent more transportation units. Plus, they have weapons like giant skeletons," Agatha said, frowning. "It took us over half a year to build the ten railway stations, so the demons should have had enough time to make a choice."

"The General Staff made the operation plan based on the information from this guy, Kabradhabi's testimony. According to Kabradhabi, the demons are having a battle of life and death against the enemy in the Sky-sea Realm," Edith said while glaring at the Senior Demon who glowered from the interrogation stand. "However, this letter is suggesting that even if they lose the battle, the demons would still survive and possibly even have a chance to snatch victory from the jaws of defeat. So, why didn't the demons send reinforcements to Taquila instead? It doesn't make sense. Their operation intention contradicts their action."

Everyone lapsed into thoughts.

"Also, this one, 'I know my action will subject you to criticism, but I don't think it'll affect your plan for the Western Front'," Edith read meditatively. "There seems to be nothing wrong with this statement at the first glance, but it doesn't bear close examination. He went to pursue the witches and did lose Taquila. Will it really not impact their entire plan?"

"Perhaps, Ursrook was trying to hoodwink his superior?" Roland said thoughtfully. "Nobles usually tend to do that..."

"Your Majesty, please view him as the most difficult enemy we've ever come across!" Edith said tersely. "Just treat him as another version of me who works for the demons. Do you think I'll do things like that?"

Looking at her clenched fists, Roland suddenly came to the realization that Edith was not as unflappable as she appeared. She was not completely immune to the skeptical remarks behind her back either but simply had chosen not to listen to them.

Deep down inside, she did not want to lose to Ursrook.

"Alright. Since he's serious, it means that Taquila has become their second choice... I would be inclined to believing that the demons have found a way to attack the Four Kingdoms without erecting the Obelisk or the Red Mist."

"We discussed this at the early stage of the 'Torch' project," Agatha sighed. "I still think it's impossible. Otherwise, why did they still have to save Taquila? If the demons were not relying on the Red Mist anymore, they should have infiltrated our land by now."

"Er... why are you all arguing about the impact?"

While everyone was puzzled about the demons' unusual behavior, Nightingale asked in confusion, "Doesn't that 'Western Front' sound awkward to you? The demons are on our opposite

side, so the area to the west of Neverwinter should be the east for them. Don't you think so?"

"We talk about positions always in relation to our own location. Plus, the world isn't flat," Celine explained good-naturedly. "The demons are coming from another continent. If Ursrook views the continent they are living on as the center of the world, then not only Taquila but the Four Kingdoms are also to the west of the Land of Dawn."

"I see... So, the west he's talking about isn't the same west we normally refer to, right?"

"Hang on. What did you say?" Edith asked as she looked up suddenly.

"Their west... isn't the same as our west," Nightingale answered hesitantly.

Edith's eyes sparkled. She hurried to a long desk littered with different maps, unrolled every scroll while casting it a fleeting glance before she put it aside, and then finally rested her eyes on a very crude map.

Roland studied the map for a while until he realized that it was a map of the Kingdom of Everwinter.

She pointed at the blank area to the north of the Snow Ridge, which was the most northern part of the Kingdom of Everwinter, and asked Celine, "What's that there?"

"Mountains, endless mountains that stretch away for thousands of miles between the south and the north that almost encircle one side of the Land of Dawn. We call them the ridge of the continent."

"Did the Union explore that area by any chance?"

"Of course. The Quest Society drafted a full map of the entire Land of Dawn, naturally including the ridge of the continent."

"Just a map?" Edith asked earnestly. "No other more detailed

records?"

"What are you trying to say?" Agatha asked in surprise. "It wasn't easy to draft a map because there are just so many mountains there, and they are huge. The Impassable Mountain Range is just at the very end of the whole mountain range, and its widest part could house the entire castle. The mountains are treacherous and covered in snow all the year round. Even if we marked every single mountain, how could that possibly help us?"

"I believe we overlooked an important fact here. The plan for the Western Front that the Sky Lord is talking about here probably doesn't refer to Taquila at all but the plan to attack the entire human population. Taquila is just one of their options!" Edith said while running her finger along the Impassable Mountain Range. "The demons' ultimate goal is to let the Red Mist cross over this mountain ridge. As long as they could approach the Four Kingdoms, it doesn't matter which city they choose to enter from. They simply need to erect the Obelisk!"

"You mean..." Agatha's manner tightened abruptly.

"Is there a possibility that there are unknown God's Stone mines around the ridge of continent?" Edith asked gravely.

# Chapter 1177: Before the Storm

---

"Well..." The ancient witches exchanged looks, bemused and lost.

At long last, Pasha broke the silence. "Yes, there might be."

"Can I ask a question? How did you find God's Stone mines in the past?" Roland asked.

"I can't remember the method used 1,000 years ago, but I believe it was by pure coincidence," Celine replied. "After the establishment of the Union and the Quest Society, looking for God's Stone mines became our main job."

Roland thought of the map that marked Taquila, the Misty Forest and the North Slope Mine, through which Lightning had located Agatha and thereby uncovered the old history that had once been shrouded in secrecy.

"As God's Stones can block power, we started to search for them based on this feature. Witches like Sylvie, Nightingale, Lightning and Isabella could all become researchers 600 or 700 years ago. In peacetime, there were nearly 100 witches in the search team. We found six mines in total, three of which were suitable to build a large city around." Celine went on, "Later, we discovered the technologies of the underground civilization and started using the magic core to conduct the search. Once the core generates power, the sensor could cover an area with a radius of 100 kilometers. It actually helped us find the southern end of the Misty Forest and Hermes Plateau. Unfortunately, by the time we found them, the Bloody Moon had appeared, and the demons destroyed everything."

"In other words, there was no point in the Union searching the mountain ridge," Roland said slowly. "It's inaccessible for common people, and even witches would find it hard to get there. So, it should be very inconvenient for the demons to build an Obelisk there."

"That's right," Edith said as she gave a nod of approval. "It isn't likely that they'll send all their forces, but this area is large enough to replace Taquila as their stronghold to exterminate humans. Besides, the number of the troops they could send to the mountains also depends on their preparation time. If the 'Western Front Plan Ursrook' referred to included many contingency plans..."

"The demons would have been preparing for this operation for over half a year," Iron Axe supplied the answer heavily. "Your Majesty..."

"I see," Roland said as he threw his eyes over the others. Whether or not Edith's deduction was correct, he had to confirm this intelligence first. After all, it concerned the other three kingdoms as well as the future of the human race in the next hundred years. If the demons did plan to invade men's territories via the mountain ridge as speculated, it would be a total disaster if Neverwinter continued to direct all the resources to the development of the Fertile Plains. Roland straightened up and said solemnly, "Now, hear my orders!"

"Yes, Your Majesty!" shouted the witches and officials together.

"Wendy, bring Lightning and Maggie back to Neverwinter immediately."

"Got it. I'll go right away."

"Iron Axe, implement the migration policy as soon as possible. I don't mind resorting to force."

"As you command!"

"Finally, I need the Taquila witches to provide another magic core," Roland said as he turned to Pasha. "Considering air reconnaissance alone may miss something, I need your assistance to make sure that we discover everything."

"As you wish, Your Majesty."



As the crowd was dispersed, Celine stopped Roland.

"I want to show you something, Your Majesty."

Roland thus followed Celine into the underground laboratory. To his surprise, he saw four yellowish brown stones almost identical to the Magic Ceremony Cube on the desk.

"You've already created four replicates?"

Roland went up to the workstation in earnest and fiddled one of the stones. Compared to the real Magic Cube, the replicate looked sharper, newer, with clearer patterns on it.

"Yes, but they functioned a little differently. I reckon it has something to do with their raw materials. Perhaps, the radiation race put something else in it when they made the Cube. Nevertheless, I tested them on chickens already and confirmed those tiny differences don't affect its use."

"That's even better," Roland said while he lamented the poor chickens within himself. "We need its power to last longer. I don't care about its lethality to be honest. Keep up the good work."

"No problem. Do you still need these prototypes?"

"Of course. You discovered a new energy source!" Roland praised ardently. "You can't imagine how important your research actually is. You made such a great contribution to the development of the human race that you've certainly carved a glorious place in human history!"

The next step was to design a device to convert the thermal energy released by the Magic Cube into kinetic energy. If this attempt was successful, there would soon be another industrial revolution in Neverwinter!

At these thoughts, Roland contemplated Celine's blob-like body with mournful presentiment and said, "You should be receiving a Special Award for Services to Neverwinter and congratulated by the public on the stage on the central square..."

"That's nothing, Your Majesty. I knew this kind of honor wouldn't be available to me when I decided to transfer my soul," Celine said smilingly. "I'm just doing my job. Plus, you've already fulfilled my dream in the Dream World."

...

Roland's orders were immediately spread throughout the entire kingdom.

Every day, a dozen birds rose into the air from the top of the castle and brought encrypted messages to the northeast. Every port and every fleet were making their contributions to this great relocation.

The First Army departed for the Port of Clearwater, Seawindshire, and other port cities on paddle steamers. From there, they took another ship before heading to the north.

Although the details of the operation plan had not been disclosed to soldiers and the soldiers had no idea what exactly their mission was, they immediately assembled and commenced their journey to another country without the slightest hesitation after receiving the order.

In the City of Glow, the Kingdom of Dawn.

After Horford Quinn received Hill Fawkes' letter, he summoned his son at once and said to him, "Go to the Beach Bay and Dragon Castle to let the local lords know that they should prioritize the ships from Graycastle over all other ships. Make sure they leave a docking area specifically for Graycastle. The royal family will bear all the necessary expenses!"

"Father, are you sure?" Hawn asked, frowning. "That'll cost a large sum of money and will also affect the businesses of other merchant vessels..."

"Enough!" Horford interposed irritably. "Just do what I said!"

Hawn bit his lip, his head bowed, and conceded, "Yes, father."

He turned around again and said reluctantly, "At least you should tell me what Graycastle is up to."

But Horford remained silent.

He heaved a deep sigh after Hawn withdrew and closed the door.

Horford walked up to the window and gazed upon his neighbor, muttering, "Everything's going to... change now."

In the meantime, in an underground limestone cave in the suburb of the City of Glow.

Banach Lothar settled himself into his wheelchair while studying the 200 "Unspeakable" who stood erect next to him and his 20 masked managers coldly. For years, he had relied on these followers to operate "Black Money".

"You made a lot of investments in the Kingdom of Wolfheart and the Kingdom of Everwinter in the past few years. Now it's time to reap your profits." After gazing at his followers for quite a while, Banach croaked, "I've received information from a reliable source that Graycastle's troops will soon enter the Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart. No matter what they're doing, your mission is to provide as much assistance as you can, including money, food and intelligence. 'Black Money' shall do its best to meet their needs. Do you understand?"

"Yes, sir!"

"Very well. Off you go."

Everyone immediately obeyed and trooped out of the underground hall.

Banach produced an empty vial from his inner pocket. This had been the fifth vial of liquid medicine since the Oracle had killed Appen Moya.

One more vial... He just needed one more vial to reach immortality!

Banach's hand trembled as he held up the little bottle.

"Rest assured, Oracle. I'll not let you down."

### ###

# Chapter 1178: Being a Grown-up

---

Two days after the issuance of the order before the actual implementation of the migration policy, Lightning and Maggie returned to Neverwiner.

Roland was a little shocked at the changes in the two little girls as they came into the office.

Maggie had not changed much except she was a little fuller than half a year ago, making her now terribly resemble a goose instead of a pigeon.

He was, as a matter of fact, surprised at Lightning.

Her hair was a lot longer, which cascaded down to her shoulders, a little unkempt as a result of a long-haul flight. Her face was dirty. Several ugly pouches sprouted from her patched flight suit near her legs, chest and shoulders, which Roland highly suspected they were the work of her own. Although Lightning was disheveled and windswept, she looked more like a true explorer now.

The biggest change, however, lay in her eyes and the expression she was wearing.

Roland suddenly realized she was no longer that little girl he used to know.

"Your Majesty, did you request to see me?"

Lightning said as she swept a bow.

For a second, Roland did not know what to say. Finally, he told her about Ursrook's letter and Edith's deduction from it. "If the demons do plan to do what the letter suggests, the consequence will be disastrous. Therefore, I want you guys to fly to the Kingdom of Everwinter and explore the untraversed mountain range in the north. Demons can't survive without the Red Mist. If they wanted to enter the mountainous area, they should have left some traces there."

"That's unbelievable..." Lightning remarked, her brows contracted. "It's very fortunate that Maggie found his letter, but Your Majesty, what if the demons operate underground? You must understand that what I could do is limited. It's really hard for me to spot deliberately hidden objects from above."

"That'll be the worst scenario," said Roland. "The God's Punishment Witches will bring a magic core and take off at the Shallow Beach to join you. If you can't find the demons, they'll resort to the magic core to conduct a final search." Judging from the result of the "Torch" project, Roland noticed that the demons were not as good at excavation as human beings who possessed the devouring worms. However, as the demons had, at one time, occupied half of the Land of Dawn, they were definitely more proficient in magic. As such, it was unlikely that the demons would have no knowledge of the relic of the underground civilization when even the Union had made some discoveries of the carriers during their exploration of the ruin. On the contrary, there was a big chance that there were other carriers around the ridge of the continent.

"I see. I'll do my best," Lightning replied with a nod.

"But it'll take you at least a month to get to the north of the Kingdom of Everwinter from the south of Graycastle, so you may not be able to receive support in a timely fashion. Also, the residents there, as I fear, may still remain hostile against witches. It may not even be safe in a city, so you have to be careful."

"Explorers are particularly good at surviving in the wild, Your Majesty," Lightning returned quickly. "I could live in the wilderness for a year, not to mention just one month."

"Coo, coo!" Maggie rejoined as she flapped her wings in approval.

"Sorry," Roland sighed. "You just came back, and you have to take another expedition again..."

"Your Majesty, don't feel sorry for us..." Lightning said while

averting her eyes, her voice lower. "Compared to those who sacrificed themselves for the victory, compared to Ashes... this is nothing." She soon recollected herself and continued, "Since this is a new expedition, then as usual, could you..."

For a moment, Roland did not grasp what Lightning meant. Then he came to the realization just in time. "Of course, yes," he said as he stood up and walked around the desk.

Lightning raised her hand but retracted her arms abruptly as she caught sight of her blotchy sleeves. "Oh, no, that's OK... I forgot to get changed. I smell bad. That's fine — "

Her words, however, were drowned in Roland's crushing hug.

"You did a great job. I'll ask the tailor to make you more flight suits so that you could wear them by turns."

Lightning instantly fell silent. At long last, she stifled her sniff and replied a "yes".

"And me, coo," Maggie rejoined as she craned her neck.

"You did a good job too," Roland said as he stroked her smooth feathers.

Nightingale also walked up to them and gave both a hug. "Please stay safe."

"We will."

After Lightning and Maggie withdrew, Nightingale remarked, "Lightning would have never said 'what I could do is limited' before."

Roland nodded vigorously. The old Lightning he knew would have definitely promised everything before even hearing the full account.

Leaf had told Roland that after Ashes had died together with Ursrook, Lightning had cried her eyes out and sunk into a state of despondency for several days. However, now he could not see the

faintest trace of distress in her. Roland could tell that Lightning had still not got over with Ashes' death, but she no longer wallowed in sorrow. Instead, she became more determined to fight against demons after this unfortunate loss.

"She's grown up," Roland commented.

...

Roland wished the migration campaign to start as early as possible; nevertheless, it took months to travel from Graycastle to the Kingdom of Wolfheart and the Kingdom of Everwinter. Due to the extra long commute, it was impossible for the Administrative Office and the First Army to increase the population of Neverwiner in a short period of time.

Insufficient manpower, therefore, hindered the further expansion of industrial projects he had conceived a long time ago. As the threat of the demons was still hung above his head like a naked sword suspended by a single hair, Roland was stressed out.

Fortunately, the success of the replication of the Magic Ceremony Cube offered him some consolation. He stayed at Anna's laboratory at the North Slope all day to see whether he could develop a new energy source with the cube replicates. After Lightning, Maggie and the God's Punishment Witches departed from Neverwinter on the "Roland" with the magic core, Roland invested more time in his research.

The magic steam engine would definitely benefit every industrial project in a more profound manner than any other inventions.

Celine also volunteered to help with the research. As the laboratory was located in a relatively remote area and was also heavily guarded, nobody was likely to bump in by accident. Roland was very impressed with Celine's assembling ability. Her dexterous auxiliary tentacles could install flywheels and pistons effortlessly, which really made Anna's life a lot easier.



Thus, the scene where a man, a woman and a tentacled monster worked together on a machine became the norm at the North Slope.

It wasn't long before a peculiar prototype materialized in the laboratory.

# Chapter 1179: Tri-tank Magic Power Unit

---

Anna studied the prototype up and down before she expressed her thought on the machine.

"It's pretty... small."

"But it looks nice," Celine said meditatively. "I like those tubes. They're just like tentacles."

Roland smiled. Anna and Celine viewed this new machine from a completely different perspective, and naturally, they reached different conclusions. Nevertheless, both of them pointed out the exact features of the machine.

Compared to the first cast-iron steam engine Anna had created, this prototype was much smaller. Needless to say, Anna's skills had improved a great deal since then, but most importantly, the reduction of size was mainly ascribed to the absence of a boiler.

The steam engines currently used in Neverwinter was of its fourth generation. In spite of that, the boiler portion of the machine remained pretty much the same for each generation. The steam engine still required a large combustion chamber and a furnace to operate, no matter what kind of combustible materials were in use — whether it was charcoal, wood or heavy oil. Now, the boiler was replaced with a rectangular steel box one meter in length, half a meter in width and less than 20 centimeters in height.

This box was the core power unit of the whole mechanic system.

The cube and water were put in an enclosed container with a high pressure tolerance to power the machine. The system was technologically demanding, so Roland did not think they would have been able to create such an advanced steam engine back in the Border Town even if they had obtained this cube that had once belonged to the radiation race at that time.

The steel box, which was the power unit of the machine, was embedded with three magic cubes. Its bottom was plastered with lead to block excess radiation, the top of which was lined with a dozen conduits that passed through a water tank and a condenser around the bottom. The whole "heating-converting-cooling" process was conducted in an enclosed system without any contact with the external environment. Theoretically, there would be no need to replace the thermal conductive material as long as the device was functioning properly.

Roland could have produced a smaller steam engine.

He could have replaced water, the most accessible and affordable thermal conductive material with more efficient one, such as liquid alkali metal, to further reduce the size while maintaining the same power.

However, the main purpose of building a prototype was to see if this system worked. Roland did not want to see any leak during the test. If the evaporated alkali metal and water vapor reacted, the entire laboratory would be probably blown away.

The thermal energy created by the cube would reach the water tank through the conduits to boil the water in it. After the water was heated up, everything would then be quite similar to ordinary steam engines that they were very familiar with.

Celine really liked the condensers on both sides of the machine. To maximize the heat-transfer area, each tube meandered around the box just like tentacles.

Compared to cumbersome traditional steam engines, this prototype was small and delicate with its dazzling silver box at the center and reflective copper conduits around it. Even a regular lay man who knew nothing about machinery would be able to tell which steam engine was more advanced.

It was almost like artwork.

"So... let's begin?" Roland suggested while turning to Celine and Anna.

Anna nodded as she rested her hand on the operation rod and said, "Together."

Celine placed her main tentacle on both Roland's and Anna's hands after a moment of hesitation.

"Testing on the prototype of the magic steam engine. Three, two, one, go!"

As Roland counted to three, the rod was pulled down to the bottom, turning the three magic cubes on. The new steam engine, which marked the dawn of a new age of industrialization, started running for the first time.

Yet the laboratory was perfectly silent as though nothing had happened.

"Er... did we fail?" Celine asked hesitantly as she looked at the motionless machine.

"No, it's still heating," Roland replied confidently.

After around two minutes, the central steel box trembled slightly, and the indicator light on one of the tubes emanated a soft yellow glow. The indicator light, which was actually a pressure gage made of the tablet discovered in the cave, showed changes in the air pressure within the tubes.

It took a much longer time to transmit the heat. After around another five minutes, vapor finally escaped from the water tank, and the piston started to move.

As the temperature in the tubes steadily increased, the flywheels of the steam engine spinned faster and set the water pump of the condensation system in motion. The main purpose of this water pump was to expedite the circulation of the system and send the cooled thermal conductive material back to the central box, which thus completed the whole cycle.

"It seems the machine works pretty well," Anna said while heaving a deep sigh smilingly. "The only drawback is that it's a bit slow at the beginning."

"All steam engines have that problem," Roland assented while nodding. It took time to transfer heat. Even the most efficient thermal conductor would be slower than an internal combustion engine that could almost start working immediately. As this new steam engine required at least three water tanks in theory, it would be still a lot larger than an internal combustion engine. Another shortcoming was that the Magic Cube consumed a lot of uranium, which made this prototype almost had no practical value.

Nevertheless, every industrial undertaking was time-consuming.

Once Celine figured out how to sustain the system, Roland believed this new steam engine would soon benefit the whole society. Its relatively small size made it easier for mass production and also enabled people to attach it to most transportation tools. Meanwhile, the new power source would also save a lot of space for cargos, as fuels were no longer necessary for operation.

Half an hour later, the speed of the steam engine reached its height. The whole machine shook dangerously, and the bubbling sound of water vapor gradually dissolved into an angry shrill. Apparently, three magic cubes overloaded the system. Roland thus turned off two magic cubes and finally tranquilized the prototype.

The next step was a lengthy reliability test.

This test would take approximately a week, which was also a test that would expose many potential problems. It was easy to build the machine and make it work, but it was hard to ensure that it would function properly every time.

Watching a puffing and huffing steam engine was boring, but Roland liked to talk with Anna. He felt relaxed and calm as if he and Anna had suddenly traveled back through time to the moment

they had first met.

Celine left the laboratory quietly, leaving the couple alone.

Anna rested her head on Roland's shoulder. The noises produced by the machine suddenly became muffled and distant.

"If this thing works, I'll then be one step closer to your previous world, right?"

"Yes, and probably you'll be much closer than you think. There has not been any technologies like this in that world yet."

"Can we also create those four-wheeled vehicles that you once talked about?"

"Yes, we can. I can design a simple one for you if you like."

"Sounds great!" Anna said, her face lighting up. "By the way, what will you call this machine?"

"Does it have to have a name?" Roland asked, smiling.

"Of course," Anna replied solemnly.

"Alright then. Black Technology No. 1 or Magic Cube Power Unit. Which one do you prefer?"

"It's not black at all... Oh well, I choose the latter. But how do we distinguish its various models if we use this name?"

"That's easy. One Magic Ceremony Cube represents one tank. So, this prototype can be called tri-tank magic power unit. How does that sound?"

"Sounds a little strange for some reason."

"It doesn't have to be perfect..."

Their laugh and the roar of the machine mingled together and lingered on in the air like a long murmur of music above the yard.

# Chapter 1180: Rose Café

---

The test lasted for several days. Apart from testing on the Magic Power Unit, Roland also found another way to combat stress, which was to take the witches to the Dream World. Nothing would be more relaxing than being surrounded by a group of witches who seemed to always have an insatiable curiosity about everything they saw.

In the meantime, Roland was also busy with his coffee shop business.

A month and a half later, Rose Café officially greeted its grand opening.

To keep a low profile, Roland decided to hold the opening ceremony and start the fireworks display at around 10:00 after breakfast hours. By that time, students and young professionals would have left for school and work, and elders should have gone grocery shopping. It would be the quietest hour of the day in the neighborhood.

The two-storey coffee shop was right next to the warehouse, with a rent of \$3,500 per month. He knew this number was a little higher than the average rent around this area.

However, it was not Roland's intention to make profits anyway, so he signed the paper without much negotiation with the landlord. His only request was to connect the warehouse and the coffee shop together so that he could more easily manage his inventory. Roland also promised to rebuild the wall before he surrendered the tenancy.

As Roland agreed to pay a full-year rent in advance, the landlord immediately gave his consent.

Nevertheless, this was not the real reason Roland conducted his business in this way.

He was not planning to become an entrepreneur by any means, and the Taquila witches were obviously not interested in serving customers either. In fact, the coffee shop was set up solely for their own entertainment rather than attracting businesses.

If truth be told, Roland rather hoped that nobody would visit his store.

To attain his end, Roland specially put up a sign outside the shop, listing the prices of all the drinks offered in the cafe. All of them were ridiculously expensive, around ten times the normal prices. For example, he put a regular latte ¥260 and ¥300 for a small caramel macchiato.

It should be noted that the soy milk next door only cost ¥1.5.

Roland did not think that any sensible person would choose to order here.

If someone knowingly visited the shop regardless of the daunting prices, then he must be the person who had left the note in the book.

But Roland was not quite sure whether this "Rose Cafe" was the same one the messenger was looking for.

"Your Majesty, is that OK now?" Phyllis asked as she put down the ribbon.

"Yes, once the ribbon is cut, Rose Café is officially open," Roland replied while nodding. "Let's have a celebration."

There was a bar and a few round tables in the coffee shop, each table decorated with a lit candle and a bouquet of roses. Soft music murmured quietly. However, when Phyllis and Roland went upstairs, the romantic atmosphere downstairs instantly gave way to raucous noises that typically existed in a restaurant.

Roland had bought a complete set of cooking utensils and a barbeque rack for the ancient witches. As KFC and the McDonald's could no longer satisfy the witches' unquenchable hunger for food



that had not been fulfilled for hundreds of years, they started to cook themselves. The experience at that buffet enlightened them as to the science behind cuisines, so they became extremely excited to try out on their own. It took them a while to learn how to use stoves and microwaves. However, they soon got the hang of cooking and started to follow the steps on recipes.

Many of them, for example, Phyllis, were surprisingly talented. The food they made was indeed very professional. They not only had excellent cutting skills but seemed to just know the secret of brewing and simmering as well.

"Your Majesty, I just learned how to make braised eels. Would you like to try it?"

"This is roasted pork loin I just made!"

"Your Majesty, could you help me find some recipes for cold dishes?"

From their exhilarated looks, Roland judged the witches enjoyed cooking as much as they watched a movie or took a tour.

Roland felt a little sorry that they could not live in this world forever. After Elena died, Roland had made several attempts to look for her in his dream but to no avail. Nothing had changed in either the warehouse or the apartment.

This meant that they would eventually leave him one day.

Death, whether a natural death or being killed in action, would transform everything into a thin thread of memory.

Probably that was why the witches treasured every single trip to the Dream World.

Perhaps, he should sleep more at night, just to let them stay here a little longer if not for himself.

Ding.

Just at that moment, the bell downstairs rang.

The witches instantly fell silent.

"Your Majesty, there's a customer coming," Phyllis reminded Roland.

Roland did not expect to see the messenger come that fast right after his opening. He cast a glance at everyone and said in a hushed voice, "Do what I planned." With these words, Roland and Phyllis went downstairs. Among all the ancient witches, only Phyllis, who had once disguised as a maid in "Black Money", had customer service experience.

"Not a single person at the bar. Are you really planning to provide job opportunities to your relatives?"

The customer who stepped into the store gazed at Roland suspiciously, her arms folded and her brows knitted. Her eyes lingered on Roland's cheeks and collar for a few seconds.

This customer was Garcia.

Roland was hugely relieved. Garcia knew about his business and she had actually helped him a lot with the moving. He beckoned Phyllis to bring two coffees and then gestured Garcia to sit down. "Of course. I always want them to get out of their village."

"Hang on, I'm not going to — "

"My treat. It's free."

Garcia took a seat and said, "Anyway, the prices you list out there are just highly unrealistic. It really makes people doubt your true intention to open this store."

"You're wrong," Roland said truthfully. "The most important thing for them now is adapting to the new environment. They just moved here from the countryside. If tons of customers swarm in at a time, do you think they'll feel at ease? They'll probably freak out. I don't care about profits but more about them getting used to the city life. That's the reason I opened this Rose Café."

"R-really?" Garcia asked skeptically.

"Of course. Also, I have to thank you for the invitation card last time. It helped me a lot," Roland steered away the subject.

"So, all settled?"

"Not only did he fix their status but he also sent them to school. It's the same school as Zero, but they're in high school," Roland explained smilingly. "The three girls wanted to thank you for your help."

"I'm glad to hear that..." Garcia said, her expression softened. "They don't have to thank me. You did all the work. After all, I didn't come forward to confront my father and media."

Roland shook his head and said, "You did all that you could."

There was a mute interval.

"Coffee. Enjoy," Phyllis broke the silence.

Garcia came out of her reveries and picked up the cup. After a moment of hesitation, she said, "I need to tell you something."

"Regarding the Martialist Association?" Roland asked. He knew Garcia must have some important business to share.

Garcia nodded and said, "Yes, there's a task, and the Association wants you to deal with it."

"I hope it's not a show or anything like that. I've heard the Martial Arts Contest this year is drawing close."

"No... it's a joint mission to annihilate Fallen Evils," Garcia corrected him gravely.

# Chapter 1181: The Best Team Combination

---

Roland twitched his lips. The term "annihilation" seemed a little barbarous for a society governed by law. Roland commented airily, "Sounds like something extraordinary."

"It isn't as complicated as you think," Garcia retorted as if having seen through Roland's mind. "There are precedents. Normally, the Association intends to gain more information about Fallen Evils through this kind of mission and kill them all at one shot. It'll actually be much safer to have some preparation in advance than fighting an unexpected Fallen Evil alone."

"Have you participated in any joint missions before?"

"Er..." Garcia faltered. "I only heard about those missions from my master because I wasn't qualified to participate in any before. This is my first time." She paused for a second, her eyes fixed on the coffee cup in her hand, and said, "Perhaps you don't really mind that, but I have to make it clear first. When you got that hunting license, you surpassed me. The Association asked me to inform you because you're relatively new, so you might not be very familiar with the transition. If you feel it improper, that's fine. I'll let the Association know — "

"No, that's OK," Roland interrupted her. "Since it was you who asked me to join the Association in the first place, naturally you should take on a leadership role, shouldn't you?" Roland had no intention whatsoever to glorify the Martialist Association or become a leader. His main purpose of joining this organization was to simply probe into the mystery around the Erosion and the Force of Nature while at the same time earning some extra incomes.

Garcia stared up into Roland's eyes for quite a while, a little bemused, and then burst into a laugh. "A leadership role — you're so strange... I know you don't want to take the responsibility, so you make it sound like you offer the position to me," Garcia said,

apparently looking a lot more relieved.

"Yup, I just don't want to say it out loud," Roland said indifferently with a shrug. "Back to the business. So, anyone else joining us this time? Who's our target?"

"To avoid unnecessary information leak, we'll disclose the plan once everyone has arrived," Garcia said as she gulped down the coffee. "But I've heard that some modern martialists will also join in this mission."

Roland nodded understandably and asked, "When and where are we going to meet up?"

"Tomorrow evening, 6:00, in the southern suburb. I'll text you the details. You could go by yourself or I could give you a ride."

"I'll go by myself," Roland said quickly. It would be impossible to take witches with him if he went with Garcia.

Garcia replied while twitching her lips, "Up to you." Then she waved at Phyllis and passed her a note. "I'm Roland's neighbor. I'm just living next door in Room 0827. If you encounter any problems in this city, feel free to contact me. I mean if you're under duress or coercion, call me at this number. I'm happy to help."

Phyllis winked and said, "Th-thank you."

"You're welcome," Garcia said while patting Phyllis on the shoulder with a smile. She waved at Roland at the doorstep and said, "Well, see you tomorrow then."

With another silvery clink and clatter, Garcia vanished from behind the door.

"She's nice," Phyllis remarked. "Your Majesty, are you going?"

"Since the Association appointed me, I don't think I could turn it down. I guess this is the price I have to pay for the hunting license," Roland said indifferently. "There are other people working with me as well, so it shouldn't be very dangerous as long

as we proceed with caution. It's actually not too bad to partake in such an event once in a while." With a group of witches around him, Roland could almost guarantee the victory. Killing was also an effective way to alleviate stress.

"Then I'll inform Lady Pasha and bring some combat witches to assist you," Phyllis said on a bow.

...

Roland selected four witches to come with him for this mission, who were Phyllis, Faldi, Ling and Dawnen. They could track enemies while at the same time covering up their traces, which was exactly what Roland needed to carry out this mission.

The next day, Roland drove his mini van to the designated spot.

They were meeting up at a remote but accessible rest area in the suburb, from where they would change vehicles to avoid unwelcome attention.

Roland thought the Martialist Association was indeed quite thoughtful.

However, when he reached the rest area, he realized that he had been seriously wrong.

The parking lot was lined with luxurious cars, attracting a lot of onlookers. A knot of people was congregated there, shrilling in excitement. It was evident that they had spotted some celebrated martialists.

"Luo Luo, look over here!"

"Can I take a photo with you?"

"Are you coming here to film a commercial?"

"Is that the runner-up last year, Mr. Youlong?"

"Wow, he smiled at me! He's so hot!"

Roland rolled his eyes, wondering if these guys were really here

for the mission. As soon as he parked his car, Garcia came up to him.

"Get under your veil."

"Got it," Dawnen muttered as she summoned the Veil of Invisibility and threw it over the three witches.

Roland got off the vehicle and waved at Garcia. "You're fast."

"You have a hunting license now. Why are you still driving such a... battered vehicle?" Garcia asked in confusion. "I understand that you like to keep a low profile, but... this is a little too much. This is shabby."

"Really?" Roland said while spreading out his hands. "I actually feel it quite convenient. You can use it for grocery shopping, and it's large enough to store a large quantity of food. I don't think other vehicles can do that." Roland left the other reason unsaid, which was that you would never know how many witches you could hide in this van.

"Alright then," Garcia said quite resignedly, "if you really don't mind how people look at you."

"I don't care it at all," Roland said while smiling indifferently. "Are those profligates also martialists?"

"Yes, but don't say that to anyone else," Garcia said while darting Roland a cold glance. "They joined the Association earlier than you. So, technically, they're all your seniors."

"What about their titles in the Association?"

"That would be even worse because they know you represent traditional martialists," Garcia sighed. "They won't miss any opportunity to embarrass you."

"I thought martialists were all selfless heroes like you," Roland mumbled. "By the way, you're also a modern martialist, right? Is that OK to stay so close to me?"

"Not everyone cares about the conflicts between modern and traditional martialists," Garcia grunted. "Plus, you asked me to take on a leadership role, didn't you?"

"I did," Roland said with a smile. "Then I'll follow your instructions."

"Well, as your senior, let me briefly introduce them to you. You probably saw some of them at my father's party, so I'll just go over the three main figures," Garcia said as she raised her eyebrows at several people at the center of the crowd. "Luo Hua, a well-established martialist, with excellent combat techniques. He has a lot of fans and was ranked No. 10 last year, which was the best in this city. He's only 22 but has already gained a lot of experience. That's pretty impressive."

"Mr. Youlong, not sure about his exact age but possibly between 30 and 35, was one of the representatives of modern martialists. His whole family is dedicated to martial arts, and that's how he got his nickname. Mr. Youlong is an all-rounder. People say that he's powerful enough to be a 'guard'. He was the runner-up last year, and I'm pretty sure he's aiming for championship this year. I believe he'll be the captain for this mission."

Garcia broke off and looked around as if searching for something. Then she pointed to a pavilion outside the parking lot and said, "The last one is probably the person that you have to approach with extra caution."

Roland looked in the direction Garcia pointed.

"Fei Yuhan, one of the most gifted martialists in recent years, who entered the final match within only five years," Garcia remarked half admiringly and half enviously. "I didn't expect to see her here. With her joining the team, this will probably be the best team combination."

"So, what do I have to take extra caution for? Is she going to mess up with me?"



"Rubbish," Garcia said while rolling her eyes. "You and she are not even in the same league. I just want to remind you that you should be careful not to crush on her!"

# Chapter 1182: Infiltration

---

"That's not what you said when you handed me the hunting license," Roland said to himself indignantly. He said, "Why are you introducing modern martialists only? Normally, they should send more old-school martialists to kill Fallen Evils. Don't you think so?"

"There are indeed more old-school martialists, but..." Garcia broke off and pointed at a knot of people whom, Roland had mistakenly regarded as irrelevant onlookers. "I don't have any detailed information about them. They work alone. Few Association members know where they normally go except for their agents. So, I practically have nothing to tell you."

Abashed, Roland mopped his forehead involuntarily. He had thought those homely, disheveled middle-aged men were just assistants or chauffeurs to the celebrated martialists. Their unkempt image, which formed a glaring contrast with the refined, cultivated modern martialists, made Roland suddenly have an urge to convert to the opposing party. He really did not want to be the representative of a group of bedraggled, lulling middle-aged men.

Could he still register for the trials of the Martial Arts Contest?

Just then, a black bus pulled into the parking lot.

"That's the bus from Prism City," Garcia said. "Let's go."

"OK," Roland said as he patted his right shoulder, gesturing for the witches to follow him. As long as Faldi's bug was attached to him, the witches would always be able to locate him.

Garcia and Roland went straight to the back of the bus.

"I like this seat best," Roland said as he stretched his legs and leaned back in the chair unceremoniously. "I feel like a king in this seat, as I can see everything that happens in the bus from here."

"You just want to be a loner. I get it," Garcia snapped.

"I didn't beg you to sit with me," Roland retorted, a little frustrated to notice that he and Garcia were always bickering.

"It's your first time to participate in a mission. I, as your senior, obviously have to keep an eye on you."

While they were glaring at each other, a rush of loud chatter caught their attention.

"Miss Fei Yuhan, over here."

"Yuhan, come sit with me!"

As that genius girl got on the bus, everyone stood up and offered the seat beside them.

"It appears that even for famous martialists, they're treated differently," Roland commented.

"That's right," Garcia assented quite surprisingly.

However, to everyone's dismay, Fei Yuhan did not accept any of the offers but walked straight to the back.

"Is there anyone sitting here?"

Fei Yuhan asked placidly while pointing at the seat next to Roland.

Garcia shifted her eyes between Fei Yuhan and Roland, trying to figure out what had happened between the two.

Having no idea what Fei Yuhan was up to, Roland coughed uncomfortably, realizing that all the eyes on the bus were locked on him. Finally, he said, "No."

"Thanks," Fei Yuhan muttered, nodding, and took the seat matter-of-factly. "Nice to meet you. Well, actually, we already met. Hello, I'm Fei Yuhan. I'm looking forward to working with you."

"Er, me too. I'm Roland. This is... Miss Garcia."

There was an awkward silence after this brief introduction.

Garcia fell silent and started to play with her phone. Fei Yuhan,

on the other hand, sat upright in her seat, looking as aloof and frosty as ever. Roland, who was sitting between the two girls, suddenly found himself in the spotlight, under the curious scrutiny of all the passengers on the bus.

The bus slowly picked up the speed.

While he was planning to switch seats with Garcia, Fei Yuhan suddenly turned around and whispered tentatively, "Your Majesty?"

Bang.

Garcia's dropped her phone.

Momentarily stunned, Roland stared at Fei Yuhan in a daze before a proper response took shape in his mouth. "You —"

However, before he could organize his words, a booming voice cut across him, "Good afternoon, everyone. I'm the liaison officer CO2 for this mission. I'll be responsible for intelligence and logistic support. You can call me O2. In the next few hours, I'll tell you about the details of this mission, including our target and operation plan. Please feel free to ask me if you have any questions." A man in a suit at the front was holding a microphone.

Roland fought down the words that were threatening to come out and averted his eyes to the liaison officer.

"According to my intelligence, Fallen Evils have become increasingly active recently and started to act in groups, which, according to our historical records, means that the Erosion is around the corner. The Association learned from reliable sources that some Fallen Evils are going to congregate in an abandoned factory in the southern suburb. We still don't know their motive, but we're sure they're up to no good."

"Perhaps they just want to make some friends."

Luo Hua's comment caused a roar of laughter.

"I wish it was true," O2 replied good-naturedly. "Unfortunately, Fallen Evils are our biggest enemy. I would rather see them all die. There's an underground highway leading straight to the factory. After it was shut down, the road was abandoned. The Association created a secret passageway two days ago that could take us directly to the headquarters of our enemies. To make sure that we don't wake the sleeping dog, we are going to take action at 9:00 PM and distribute the necessary equipment when you get off the bus."

"Also, the army will also assist us to prevent any Fallen Evils from escaping. However, only people with the Force of Nature can inflict an injury on those monsters. Therefore, we have to divide into two teams. One to attack the Fallen Evils while the other cuts off their retreat. There's a list underneath your chair telling you which team you are in. If you don't have any more questions, we'll carry out the operation as planned..."

...

Fei Yuhan fumbled with the list expressionlessly. Her thoughts, however, had strayed away from the upcoming operation to Roland's interesting reaction when she had called him "Your Majesty".

Normally, a person would feel abashed, furious and mortified in this kind of situation when he realized that someone had seen through his scheme. He might not necessarily reveal these feelings, but Fei Yuhan was confident that she could discern every single change in his emotion as well as his subsequent disguise, unless he had predicted that this would happen.

Nevertheless, what she had just seen was a look that contained a multitude of feelings.

There were surprise, alert, confusion, and even a little bit of delight. For a second, Roland's lips had taken shape of a silent "yes", which he had quickly forced down his throat.

Fei Yuhan could not find a satisfying explanation to this reaction.

Apparently, it was Roland's first time meeting her, and there was no reason for him to give such a response.

She did not notice the faintest trace of embarrassment. Was he actually used to being called "Your Majesty"?

Suddenly, she remembered the conversation between Roland and the three little girls at the party. She had thought it was just a juvenile game they played, but now she was not so sure.

Was he really... the king of two worlds?

Her initial interest in competing against Roland now transformed into an overwhelming curiosity about Roland himself.

Fei Yuhan thought she had made the right choice to join in this operation. Her master had once told her that the history of the Martialist Association was even longer than she had thought. The Association knew numerous secrets known by only a few people, some of which were even related to the origin of this world.

Was that the real reason that Roland had been granted the hunting license?

Seeing Roland looked anxious, Fei Yuhan suppressed her questions. She did not wish to create any hostility with Roland before knowing the answer.

She was certain that there would be plenty of time for her to get to know Roland in the future.

...

Two hours and a half later, the bus came to a halt at the end of the underground highway.

The martialists divided into two groups and moved into position according to the instructions on their map.

Roland and Fei Yuhan were both on the team responsible for attacking the Fallen Evils, while Garcia was on the other. She soon

vanished from their sight into the night after reminding Roland to stay safe.

As Garcia had expected, Mr. Youlong, who was rumored to be almost as powerful as a "guard", had been elected as the captain of the assault team. "Follow me, all of you," he said while eyeing the rest of the team members encouragingly, and crawled into a ventilation duct.

The operation appeared to be more organized than Roland had thought. After they got off the bus, everyone received a pair of head-mounted, panoramic night vision goggles, a watch that could show their current location on the map, a vest equipped with identification and enemy recognition devices, and a headset for communication. Roland wished that the First Army could also have such advanced equipment, in which case, they would not have to fight so bitterly during a night battle.

He made a rough head count and noticed that there were 15 people in total in the assault team. Apart from Mr. Youlong, Luo Hua and Fei Yuhan, all the other members were old-school martialists. It seemed that the Association still trusted traditional martialists more than modern ones for this kind of mission. However, if the result of this operation turned out that modern martialists actually performed better, their confidence in traditional martialists might be shaken.

Roland had no intention of meddling in the affairs of traditional and modern martialists. In fact, he was simply curious how those celebrated martialists would cope with relentless Fallen Evils, wondering if they could still defeat them as effortlessly as they had done to their opponents during a match.

Through the night vision goggles, Roland could see everything clearly. They moved through the night soundlessly like ghosts and soon reached their destination.

# Chapter 1183: Sacrifice

---

"Here it is," Sir Youlong said in a hushed voice.

The party observed the surroundings cautiously by looking through the ventilation duct. They found themselves in a large plant, where a few overhead bridge cranes were hanging on either side of the wall. Below lay nothing but some dilapidated machine tools and rusty conveyor belts covered in dust. Apparently, the plant owner had removed every piece of usable equipment before he had shut the plant down.

The empty factory, however, was now lit by several torches, with their dazzling, greenish-white flames dancing around in the darkness. These torches were set in a circle, and there were around twenty distorted shadows in the middle.

"Are those shadows our targets?" asked Luo Hua.

"Most likely," one of the traditional martialists replied. "I can sense their fluctuating power, which tells me that these people are at the last stage of transitioning."

The last stage referred to a stage where the humans would completely lose their humanity and consciousness, thus becoming corrupted puppet. Fallen Evils at this stage only acted on their instincts like animals, as they lost all the communication ability they once had.

"They used to be... martialists?"

"Not necessarily. Although there were some fallen martialists according to the Association's records, generally speaking, amateurs are more prone to corruption."

"It's my first time seeing a living Fallen Evil, but regardless, a martialist lack of self-discipline and proactivity is, in every aspect, useless," Luo Hua snorted with utmost contempt. "Pathetic... they don't deserve the Force of Nature. Captain, let's do this."



"Wait a minute," Sir Youlong stopped Luo Hua calmly. "It appears that more Fallen Evils are coming here. Wait until they've all gathered so that we can kill them all in one go. But, don't you feel that this is strange? These Fallen Evils are all in their last stages. Why didn't they go kill the amateurs? Why did they come here? I have a feeling that things aren't as simple as we thought. Perhaps, we should first find out their intentions rather than killing them all outright."

While everyone was exchanging opinions, Roland stole a glance at Fei Yuhan.

That unexpected "Your Majesty" seemed to be still ringing in his ears.

Within a few seconds, turbulent emotions had flooded through Roland. He had not been so perturbed by someone over the past few years since his ascendance to the throne.

At first, Roland had thought it was Elena calling him and he had almost responded, but he had swallowed his words at the last minute. If Fei Yuhan was really Elena's incarnation, she would not have introduced herself in the first place and taken the seat beside him so carefreely.

The abrupt change from joy to disappointment was almost as painful as the grief itself. As he recollected himself in the next few minutes, he soon figured out why Fei Yuhan had addressed him like this. Garcia had told him that martialists were usually acute observers, particularly for those gifted ones. As Fei Yuhan had attended the party held by the Clover Group, she must have overheard his conversation with the witches.

The next question was — how much did Fei Yuhan know about him?

Roland judged that she probably did not know much at this stage, considering how she was still testing him. At least, she didn't know anything about the other world yet. However, this was alarming to

Roland, since no one would want to know that he was only fictional and only existed in dreams. Once the secret about this Dream World was known to someone, the consequences would be disastrous.

Garcia was right. He needed to be extra cautious when dealing with Fei Yuhan.

"Mhm? Look, the new Fallen Evil... looks a little different than the others." At that moment, a voice from the headset interrupted Roland's train of thought. "It seems that it's commanding the other Fallen Evils."

Roland took off his goggles and looked toward the center of the plant through the ventilation. He saw a group of Fallen Evils slowly walk in while carrying three cargo containers, all the while at the command of a man in a suit.

"Are they the Fallen Evils who have yet to completely lose their minds?" Sir Youlong mumbled in bewilderment. "What are they playing at?"

Several traditional martialists frowned. Compared with transformed Fallen Evils, those still in transitioning period were normally more difficult to deal with. At that stage, compassion and empathy had escaped them, but the dark side of human nature, such as subterfuge and shrewdness, remained. Typically, these Fallen Evils used to be well-established martialists.

"Shh — " Fei Yuhan suddenly spoke. "Be quiet. Something's in those containers."

Everyone held their breath immediately.

After a while, Fei Yuhan said heavily, "There are people... inside."

"What?"

"I heard someone crying and pleading. It seems like they're gagged."

"You're saying that there are civilians in those containers?" Sir Youlong asked in surprise. "I've never seen anything like this before in the Association's records. Fallen Evils do kill often, but they don't really pick on common people."

They looked at each other in confusion when suddenly, the commander of the Fallen Evils yelled, "It's time, children! The divine will is approaching, and God is waiting for the sacrifices!"

"Grrrrr — " all the other Fallen Evils growled.

"Come. Let the power return to its source and let the Oracle grace continent with his presence once more!"

"Grrrrr—"

"We'll be reborn with the destruction of this world! Surrender everything to God. Let's offer our sacrifice!"

The Fallen Evils produced an ear-splitting roar.

"Damn it, we have to act. Now," Sir Youlong said through clenched teeth. Although he had never heard Fallen Evils would perform human sacrifice or please the so-called God like some cults, they could not let innocent civilians die. In fact, as the mission of the Martialist Association was protecting the world, it was more important to save lives than annihilating the Fallen Evils. "Let's stay as close to the containers as possible to prevent these monsters from approaching them. It's OK to let one or two go. I believe the other team will finish them off!"

Fei Yuhan nodded expressionlessly and darted out first.

The others followed at her heels and dashed toward the enemies.

The deserted plant was instantly stirred!

Caught unprepared, the Fallen Evils collapsed under the impact of the Force of Nature and paralyzed when their cores were detached from their bodies.

Roland was the last to act. He followed his team members while

at the same time hiding his ability carefully. This was not his first time fighting Fallen Evils, so he was much more experienced than the others. Unlike those awakened martialists possessed of the Force of Nature, Roland did not need to throw himself into a fierce battle. Fallen Evils would immediately lose their power upon touching him and be at his mercy. Roland did not wish to touch those detached red cyclones either, otherwise everyone would see numerous cores rise into the air of their own accord.

Meanwhile, the bug on Roland's shoulder trembled slightly, which indicated that Phyllis and the other witches had arrived. Supported by his witches, Roland felt more and more confident. He did not employ specific combat techniques, but he killed more Fallen Evils than anyone else except Fei Yuhan.

As the other team members were all focused on the containers, and Roland had been super cautious, nobody discovered his secret ability.

They soon reached the containers. Only a few of them were injured.

By that time, half of the Fallen Evils had been killed.

"Well, that's easier than I thought," Luo Hua said as he shook off the blood on his hands, snatched the lock, and broke it in half. "The Association should have issued me a hunting license as well. Hey, don't be afraid. The Martialist Association is here to help — "

Luo Hua stopped dead.

The other members all took a step back.

There were dozens of people tied to several metal posts, their eyes blinded and mouths sealed, who groaned with fear in one of the containers. A cyclone suspended in midair above each of them.

Roland felt all the hair at the back of his neck stood up.

He suddenly remembered what Garcia had told him several months ago.

"These cyclones are where Fallen Evils gain their power. They're signs of corruption. Once a person is corrupted, he loses his Force of Nature. If we don't store away these cyclones, they'll infect other people. Ordinary people will instantly lose their minds upon a single touch."

"Are you saying... that they can be transferred to multiple people?"

"That's why some people are collecting them. That's exactly what they're thinking. Are they not afraid that they'll destroy this world?"

"So... the Fallen Evils have been preparing over the past half a year just for this moment?"

Roland whipped his head around and stared at the leader of the Fallen Evils.

He dressed like a butler, wearing a pair of monocled spectacles, with his hair combed all the way to the back of his head. His suit crisp and his white gloves spotless. However, his face was now contorted with rage.

"We don't necessarily need you to complete this human sacrifice. However, the more victims, the better. Don't you think so?" With these words, he snapped his fingers.

The cyclones above the containers instantly dropped.

"No—!"

Luo Hua attempted to untie the prisoners. However, as they were so tightly packed in the container that it was impossible to rescue them without touching the suspending cyclone.

"Kill them, now!" a traditional martialist shouted.

"But... these are all civilians..." Luo Hua muttered.

Within a few seconds, those ordinary people had completed their transition to new Fallen Evils. Although they were not as strong as

Fallen Evils that transformed from martialists, with so many of them, it was still quite dangerous.

The Fallen Evils then swarmed out of their container, and Luo Hua was soon drowned by the wave of the enemies.

# Chapter 1184: Corruption

---

The situation suddenly turned for the worse.

Both Sir Youlong and Fei Yuhan looked startled and lost at the abrupt change in the unfolding of the event. Fortunately, a traditional martialist turned around just in time and stopped the Fallen Evils.

"Get out of here!" a flustered middle-aged martialist yelled. "We must find a way out!"

The other two containers also started to wobble ominously as the people inside banged frantically against the container. Numerous lumps and bumps started to emerge on the surface of the iron containers. A lock was definitely not enough to hold them back, and the prisoners would soon break out.

If there were also dozens of prisoners in each of these two boxes, let alone killing the Fallen Evils, there was a chance that the whole team would be wiped out.

The last thing they wanted was being trapped by the enemies, so they must use all their efforts to avoid that situation!

Fei Yuhan immediately pulled herself together and darted toward the entrance of the plant. The only way to get themselves out of this dilemma was to find an open space and scatter.

This was the right plan.

Roland decided to wait until everyone had left the scene. He was putting all his efforts dealing with those new Fallen Evils who lunged at him like zombies. They were not necessarily dangerous, but Roland would still get injured if he got bitten.

"This is Team One. We're outnumbered and under attack. We request immediate assistance!" Sir Youlong yelled over the speaker phone while fighting.

A moment later, another two martialists fell down before a pack of crazy Fallen Evils who soon ripped their bodies apart.

Sir Youlong's moves significantly slowed down as he watched his fellow martialists torn into pieces. Even Roland, a layman, noticed that his action had become seemingly sluggish. After knocking down a few more Fallen Evils, Sir Youlong got a scratch for the first time.

BANG!

The containers were finally burst open and crashed to the ground as the raging Fallen Evils rushed out.

However, there were fewer Fallen Evils than they had thought.

Roland raised his eyebrows. A dozen tethered Fallen Evils, who had completed their transitioning, lay dead in the containers. Their blood oozing profusely from the several holes in their bodies, as though being penetrated by something.

He could clearly see a line of holes on the walls of the containers.

"Nicely done," Roland praised in his heart.

Without a doubt, it was Phyllis's work. Roland could even see in his mind's eye that Phyllis had sneaked around the containers under Dawnen's Invisibility Veil and dived her Blade Claws into the boxes.

"What... what happened?" the leader of the Fallen Evils bellowed. "What did you do to my children, you filthy scoundrels!"

Nobody responded to him. Although everybody was as confused as the leader, they could not afford to give the incident any thought. As the number of their enemies reduced remarkably, the martialists felt, once again, encouraged and saw the ray of hope and survival.

"Fine, whatever," the leader grunted while stamping his feet. "Nothing shall thwart my plan. You'll all end up dying here!"



With these words, he took out a square box that reminded Roland of a remote and pressed the button on it decisively.

With a deafening roar, the plant exploded, and the ground cracked and sank rapidly. The torches went flying into the air and extinguished as gusts of wind swept over the plant. Within a second, they found themselves groping in an impenetrable darkness.

"Son of a b\\*tch!" Roland swore, unable to help himself. He had never anticipated that the Fallen Evils would bury explosives underneath the ground. Although Roland had special abilities, he could not fly like Lightning.

"Your Majesty!" Just at that critical moment, a little hand had reached Roland.

Roland staggered until someone steadied him with a firm clutch. They finally landed safely after wallowing in the aftermath of the explosion.

"Aargh... Ling?" Roland asked in a low tone while coughing in the dust.

"Yes, it's me. Are you okay?" Ling replied immediately. "The light was out, so I was able to spot you in the dark."

Ling specialized in moving about in darkness. As the torchlight was extinguished and darkness fell upon the entire plant, she could glide through shadows as Nightingale fly through the Mist.

"I'm fine. How about the other witches?"

"Don't worry. Phyllis is with us. The explosion won't hurt Dawnen either. Faldi is keeping an eye outside the plant, so she's fine too."

"That's great," Roland said as he pulled on the goggles mounted on his head and started to look around.

"Your Majesty, what's this? It looks like that Eye Demon..." Ling

asked curiously.

"It's a night vision device that helps you see things at night," Roland explained. "So you ought to be careful even in the darkness. Remember, you shouldn't be seen."

"Okay..." Ling promised as she disappeared into the darkness again while only poking out half of her head. Some bubbles escaped from her nose as if she were submerged in water.

Under the dismal moonlight that spilled across the ground, Roland soon understood the current situation.

The group was dispersed. The plant was littered with concrete slabs. Roland could not see where his other team members were. However, he assumed that such an explosion would not be fatal to martialists who were normally protected by the Force of Nature. As the Fallen Evils were also well aware this fact, they must have other plans. What he needed to do was to hold out until the second group came to their rescue. By that time, they would be able to interrupt the Fallen Evils' sacrifice ceremony.

What bothered Roland, however, was the hole created by the explosion.

According to Co2, there was no basement underneath the plant. Moreover, judging from the map, the plant should have been built on a flat surface.

The bumpy walls around them were apparently not a part of the plant.

In other words, the Fallen Evils had excavated the ground underneath the plant and buried the explosives in advance.

Why did they do that?

Roland noticed that the area close to the rim of the hole was relatively flat, but it soon steepened with a sheer drop, as if it was a huge whirlpool. The bodies of the dead Fallen Evils slid into the whirlpool and piled up.

"Is this... also a part of the sacrifice ceremony?"

Roland's suspicion was soon confirmed. He saw the leader of the Fallen Evils reappear. At his command, the rest of the Fallen Evils stopped searching for the martialists. Instead, they all jumped into the hole along with their cyclones. Not only did they carry the dead Fallen Evils with them but they also snatched up the bodies of the martialists. Within a blink of an eye, the hole had almost been filled up.

Roland's heart stopped with a queer jerk. Suddenly, a warmth spread through him as though something was summoning upon him.

"Dear God, please accept our offering!" the butler exclaimed with his hands outstretched and fell forward into the hole.

Just at that moment, a jet of dazzling light erupted from all the cyclones!

Roland pulled off his goggles, standing agape. The crimson cyclones slowly rose, clustered then spread out, gradually forming a large, irregular-shaped "corrupted" area!

Then, something crept out of the corrupted area and took the form of a faceless man, but it only possessed a head and two hands. The shape was simply an inky silhouette strewn with numerous swirling stars, which reminded Roland of the black, unfathomed universe.

As the human-shaped shadow materialized, scarlet blood started to exude from its body and immediately spread through the entire hole on the ground, distorting the underground into a twisted space with red and black.

The bug on Roland's shoulder began to buzz, indicating that Faldi had sensed danger.

Roland had seen a similar scene before. He had once encountered a magic creature during a fight with a Fallen Evil. However, this

one was much larger. It was almost two or three stories tall when it reared with only upper half of its body!

That was the real purpose of this human sacrifice. The Fallen Evils intended to create corruption and summon the monster that was not belonging to this Dream World!

But Roland did not understand why they chose to do this today and while luring the Martialist Association. The could summon the creature anytime.

He soon got the answer.

Dozens of black tentacles soaked in blood suddenly sprouted from the ground, dragged a martialist from underneath a concrete slab, and handed him over to the magic creature.

"M-monster..." the captured martialist stammered, making every effort to break away from the clutch but failed miserably.

"You stole something that doesn't belong to you, and you attempt to keep it to yourself. Now, it's time to return it to its owner." The magic creature snatched up the martialist, tossed him into the hole and said, "I'll correct this mistake and restore order upon the world. Now, accept your fate and return to the origin of the world!"

Its ringing proclamation reverberated across the deserted plant. With the corrupted area expanding rapidly, the monster grew larger as well, as though it was soon going to leap out of the ground.

# Chapter 1185: A Warning of Destruction

---

The martialists were out of the pan and into the fire.

They could not approach the corrupted area controlled by the Fallen Evils. If they wanted to escape, they would have to crawl out of the hole that stood ten meters tall in front of them while avoiding those black tentacles. Once being caught by those tentacles, it would be impossible to wrench away from their grip. They knew they were now facing an unbeatable enemy, and not everyone had the courage to step forward and walk into the arena of death with their head held high.

The only person who chose to fight was Fei Yuhan.

"You guys go first!"

She hollered over the speaker phone. A flash of white shadow streaked out from the darkness and zoomed toward the magic creature. Fei Yuhan's body emanated a soft, bright glow, which was the manifestation of the release of her Force of Nature. Before this, she could only cover her arms.

The twisting tentacles instantly lunged at her like serpents. Fei Yuhan brushed past them, barely dodging their attacks. When she foresaw a confrontation that was unavoidable, she struck them with her palm and cut those tentacles with a knife-hand. White light congregated at the tip of her fingers and formed a shape of a sharp sword.

The other martialists all fled, attempting to get out of the hole.

Sir Youlong was the first to reach the edge of the wall.

"Ludicrous. Do you think you could escape from me?"

The magic creature swung his arms down towards Sir Youlong. The arms that was not long enough to reach the wall suddenly expanded rapidly, becoming thicker and longer.

Sir Youlong wheeled around at the last second and tried to block the strike, exploding his arms with piercing light, but in an instant, the giant hand had smashed him into the ground!

The thunderous crash left a deep ditch at the bottom of the hole, and the concrete slabs were pulverized.

Sir Youlong was reduced to a bloody sack of meat.

The magic creature then scooped up that bloody, muddy body, along with some mud, and tossed it into the "crack" it stood astride. Instantly, the corrupted area expanded again.

Roland realized that it was using the martialists' Forces of Nature to expand the corruption. For some reason, he felt indignity, as though someone had robbed him of his possessions. Those Forces should have belonged to this world, belonged to him.

It was intolerable.

"Your Majesty, what do we do now?" Phyllis and Dawnen asked together behind him. "The tentacles almost filled the hole."

"We have to kill the monster before the other group arrive here, but you cannot be seen," Roland said as he patted Ling's head. "Go knock out those materialists caught by the tentacles. Be fast, and wait for further instructions."

"That's easy. I'll do that right away..." Ling replied sprightly as she submerged herself into the shadow.

"Then we'll confront that monster," Roland said as he gazed at the enemy who stood ten meters tall. Although he had dealt with similar monsters before and knew that the key to the victory was to wrench the astrolabe out of its body, it was extremely hard to approach the magic creature. After a moment of contemplation, Roland whispered instructions to Phyllis.

"Your Majesty, that's — " Phyllis exclaimed in surprise.

"Do what I say. We must kill it," Roland cut across Phyllis

decisively. "This is an order!"

"Yes..." Phyllis conceded after a moment of hesitation. "As you command."

"So, the last problem is her," Roland mumbled. He looked toward Fei Yuhan as his eyebrows contracted. She was still struggling to stand up, attempting to launch an attack although she had suffered two blows from the monster and was covered in blood.

Despite the injuries, her movement was less agile, yet she was still fighting with incredible obstinacy.

More tentacles reached out to her from different directions, which made it even harder for Fei Yuhan to approach the monster. The magic creature was too busy dealing with the fleeing martialists, or else she wouldn't still be standing at this point.

In the meantime, Ling had approached to the center of the corrupted area soundlessly.

"Your Majesty, everyone was knocked out," Ling reported over the speaker phone.

"Good job — " Roland's words rested on the tip of his tongue when he suddenly realized that the speaker phone channel was on for all the team members. Fei Yuhan apparently had heard Ling's voice, for she stumbled and, for the third time, got thrown out by the giant hand. The white light enveloping her had, by that time, completely faded out, and Fei Yuhan lost her consciousness.

"Now!" Roland yelled. The plan did not go as smoothly as expected, but this was a chance they need.

"Excuse my impertinence, Your Majesty," Phyllis said as she spread open her claws, clutched Roland's ankles and started to spin. Roland was thrown into a whirl of color, feeling his inside churning. When the spinning speed reached its maximum, Phyllis suddenly released him, and, like an arrow that cracked through space, Roland darted toward the magic creature under the

momentum.

The moment Roland left the protection of the Veil of Invisibility, the monster saw an "unidentifiable object" streak towards it. It immediately turned away from the unconscious martialists to Roland, ready to swing its huge hand down as a giant swatted a fly.

They bumped into each other.

Roland went through its black arm and ran into its chest. Its colossal body was not as sturdy and robust as it appeared. Instead, it was simply an illusion covering emptiness.

The magic creature growled in terror and suddenly yelled with a look of dawning comprehension, "It was you! You didn't listen to my advice!"

Roland grasped the spinning astrolabe in its body and wrenched it. The scarlet interface gradually turned into a blueish white, and Roland felt his power inside him whoop in exuberance as if his expectation had been fulfilled. Roland asked, "Was the monster I killed last time your brother? Sorry, he didn't say it clearly, so I didn't hear his kind advice."

"We are one, we are united — " the magic creature's voice trailed off. "Stop your foolish act. This is my last warning, otherwise you'll be regretted for what you did. Everything will be reduced to nothingness, and our endeavor's workover the past thousands of years will be wasted. You can't... bear the heavy guilt brought about by such an... horrific atrocity..."

When its astrolabe was completely separated from its body, the monster stopped talking.

Blinding white light flooded over the hole, and Roland felt deeply content as if he had attained what he desired.

He could hear the throb of the ground underneath him clearly.

For a moment, Roland had a delusion that he and this world became one.



In the chaotic Realm of Mind, the Nightmare opened its eyes abruptly!

It just sensed a rhythmic beat it had never heard before that contrasted with the disordered surroundings.

The Nightmare had had similar experiences when it had tracked down the legacy shard, but its previous attempts were all fruitless. Due to the extreme complexity of minds, any mistake would make her lose a sense of direction.

Nevertheless, this time, everything seemed to be clearer.

This indicated that the origin of this beat was very close.

Valkries grinned.

It had found the traces of that mysterious man.

# Chapter 1186: Reconstructing the Final Battle

---

The other team did not appear until the battle was over.

Roland smeared his face with mud, made a few cuts in his clothes, and lay on a heap on the ground as if he was injured like everyone else, waiting for the rescue from the Martialist Association.

Although Ling had pressed the "speaking" button on the walkie talkie by accident, fortunately, the communication was not open to all the teams. Therefore, only Fei Yuhan had heard their conversation. As she had lost her consciousness, Roland could totally attribute this bizarre communication to Fei Yuhan's perturbed mind and convince her that it was simply her illusion due to her injuries.

As to why the monster vanished in thin air without leaving the slightest trace behind, Roland could simply claim that he had well passed out before this incident had occurred. But by doing so, he could only ascribe the victory entirely to the genius girl, Fei Yuhan, and washed his hands off the whole matter.

As he expected, the liaison officer did not take his statement very seriously considering that he had not witnessed the entire battle. Instead, the Association paid close attention to the corruption. The discovery of the new, man-made corruption obviously overshadowed the six deaths, including the death of two celebrated martialists, out of the twelve martialists who participated in the mission.

The only thing that astonished Roland was that Garcia jumped into the hole before anyone else when her team arrived at the scene. Roland felt a warmth flooded over him when he saw Garcia tried to search for him among the casualties frantically while calling out his name, and when her smile showed after she found

out that Roland was alive. However, Garcia's expression had returned to her normal state of indifference quickly. She mumbled, "Wow, you're still alive. Good for you." as she threw Roland into the ambulance.

That was how this alliance mission ended.

After Roland returned to the apartment, Phyllis regarded the warning of the magic creature with apprehension. The monster had apparently noticed that Roland was different from all the other martialists, which meant that there was a possibility that what it said was true.

Roland would have contemplated the warning if this incident had occurred a year ago when he had been resisting the Dream World. At that time, the world had become increasingly complicated and foreign to him, as though it was gradually getting out of his control.

But now, he had made his decision.

The Dream World was not only a world where he obtained knowledge, but more importantly, a place that afforded the God's Punishment Witches mundane pleasures. This virtual world might not necessarily remain in existence forever. However, before that day came, he would like these witches to have as many happy memories as possible.

Another reason that he dismissed the warning was that Roland trusted his own instincts.

The change of the Dream World might start from the moment he had released the first cyclone.

Despite that Roland had yet to understand the exact relationship between the release of cyclones and the subtle change of the surroundings, he did feel satisfaction when he had defeated the magic monster by pulling out its astrolabe.

He had a vague feeling that as long as he kept fighting the Fallen

Evils, the answer would come up to him.

Furthermore, the whole event had not completely come to an end yet. Roland could imagine that the man-made corruption would spark panic among the Association and outrage in the martialist community. Once the other martialists regained their consciousness, the Association would definitely further investigate this matter and uncover the whole story of the battle. Accordingly, modern martialists would continue to criticize him and even feel animosity toward him.

Yet anyhow, Roland decided not to worry about them too much at this moment.

Three days later, the Detective Group returned to Neverwinter.

Summer had not only reconstructed the final battle but also recorded several important scenes with the Sigil of Recording. Roland thus immediately called a meeting in the hall of the Third Border City to invite all the executives to watch the show.

When they saw Ashes summon the divine power and die together with Ursrook, Roland felt a tremulous hand clasp on his arm. Roland held that hand until the magic movie ended. When he turned around, he noticed Tilly's red-rimmed eyes. Despite being distraught, Tilly managed to finish the whole movie.

Now, they had the full picture of what had happened.

"This is my first time seeing a hybrid of an Eye Demon and a regular demon," Pasha sighed at long last. "How did they do that?"

The most confusing part was how the demons had managed to arrive at the scene right after the Special Unit had reached their designated ambush area, for Roland did not believe an Eye Demon had the intelligence to develop such a clever strategy. After he watched the movie, however, he found the answer. Usrook had cut open a Mad Demon's face and deposit a box of frozen eyeballs into its wound. The eyeballs that smelled the blood instantly burst into

life and anchored its roots to the Mad Demon, who screamed in great agony. It took nearly a week for the Eye Demon to completely possess the Mad Demon.

Moreover, instead of a God's Stone of Toss, the Mad Demon had carried a very rare Stone of Flight that a regular demon was not normally entitled to.

This meant that Ursrook had prepared resources for his plan at least half a year ago.

The moment the transformed Mad Demon had left Taquila, Sylvie had been under the scrutiny of the Magic Slayer. To earn more time for his army, the Magic Slayer first flew toward the First Army and then turned around halfway to feign his defeat. While the Special Unit's attention were drawn entirely on the decoy, the demons took this opening to set up their ambush. Therefore, unless they abandoned their mission and retreated to the west, by no means could the Special Unit escape from the awaiting demons.

"As far as I can tell, this is more like a type of manipulation than a hybrid. The transformed Mad Demon works like a host," Agatha said thoughtfully. "The decoy was not the Mad Demon but the miniscule Eye Demon that mounted on its head."

"Why do you think so?" Roland asked.

"If the demons could create such a powerful hybrid, they should have used this technology in the second Battle of Divine Will. They could send a few hybrids to monitor and harass the army while dispatching a pack of Devilbeasts to attack us. If they did that, the Union would have been finished in less than five years," Agatha explained slowly. "I think it's not an ability but a technology, just like those newly-developed Spider Demons."

# Chapter 1187: The So-called Upgrade

---

"Technology..." Roland muttered while knitting his brows. He had probed into the demons' memories once and seen how they upgraded. Basically, the demons upgraded through merging with various magic stones. Failure to merge with magic stones would result in a miserable death. In a way, their upgrade method was pretty similar to witches', and probably even more cruel.

Although the demons used different technologies, once they learned the principles, they would further develop and expand the technologies based on their needs. This was definitely not a good sign for the mankind.

"Are you sure?" asked Anna, who immediately understood what that meant.

"We need to conduct further research on the remains, but..." Agatha broke off and turned to Celine.

Celine tapped her main tentacle and led everyone to a giant black stone covered in scratch marks. "This is a part of the Giant Skeleton. From the initial autopsy, we judge it's very likely a living being."

"Fair enough. This is pretty much like the armor of a deformed demon, isn't it?" Roland commented while stroking his chin. In the report, the military officer mentioned that the Giant Skeletons had produced a bloodcurdling howl after being hit by the cannon shells.

"No, Your Majesty," Celine denied, a little embarrassed. "What I was trying to say is that... the stone itself is alive."

"What?"

Dumbstruck, everybody took a step backward involuntarily.

"Hang on. You mean the stone is alive?"

"Is the stone also a type of demon?"

"I don't quite... follow you. Could you tell me more about it?"

The hall exploded with a rush of inquiries.

"To put it short, this stone is an independent system that operates on its own," Celine said as she scooped up an iron hammer and gave the stone an almighty strike. With a clank, the stone trembled, and Roland could spy, through its numerous cracks, something wriggle with pain. The stone did not stop quivering until half a minute later, and Roland was positive that the quaver was not the offspring of the blow.

"At the scene, we found a huge organ hung below the Giant Skeleton's abdomen. We thought it was the main body of the deformed demon, but the autopsy showed otherwise," Agatha continued. "This finding puzzled me and Celine. As the Skeleton could move by itself, then why is there a separate deformed demon attached to its abdomen? We didn't find out the reason until we saw the transformed Mad Demon created by the Magic Slayer."

Anna, who was the first to realize the true nature of this peculiar Skeleton, blurted out, "Is it a host?"

"Correct," Celine said approvingly. "Both the original carriers and the devouring worms could live on their own." She then turned to Roland and asked, "Your Majesty, do you still remember what Kabradhabi said? It asked us whether we also upgraded through a legacy shard."

"And it also said another thing," Roland assented with a nod. "I remember that it almost blustered 'I'm Tadalín'. It asked whether our weapons were made out of the legacy shards."

Tilly responded meditatively, "It appears that the demons learned how to create hosts from the legacy shards. That was why Kabradhabi asked such questions. In other words, both the Spider Demons and the Giant Skeletons were demon hybrids comprised of

a host and a operator."

"Very likely. They share many similarities, such as the extreme long lifespan of a carrier, the ability to remain in activity even in the state of dormancy, the ability to survive upon serious injuries, etc."

"But I don't think the underground civilization used what the demons called 'legacy shards' to complete their upgrade, because they controlled carriers by soul transfer. That's quite different..."

"Perhaps, the demons don't know how to create a magic core exactly, and that's why they can't transfer soul like the underground civilization," Agatha returned. "Or perhaps they found a more suitable way for their kind, just as the Union found a way to create the God's Punishment Army. The God's Punishment Warriors, in a sense, are hosts as well."

"Hold on, that doesn't sound right," Nightingale interposed in confusion. "Although I don't quite follow your deduction, but I'm quite sure that human beings didn't get any legacy shards whatsoever. The First Army's weapons are solely His Majesty's ideas, and the God's Punishment Army is the Union's achievement. Without the so-called legacy shards, we still learned how to create a magic core and inherited the ruin of the underground civilization."

"That's the key to the problem," Agatha replied in a serious tone. "I think obtaining the ruin is only one of the many ways to inherit a civilization, which is exactly why we call it technology rather than an ability."

Roland felt his chest suddenly constrict, and the truth seemed to come to him in one shining piece. He said, "Are you referring to... learning?"

"Yes," the Ice Witch replied on a sigh. "We could upgrade through teaching and learning, even if we don't have what Kabradhabi describes as legacy shards."



There was a brief silence in the hall.

At length, Celine spoke, "The demons have developed so many new weapons over the past 400 years. The legacy shards are probably something that helps them learn faster, or even something that enables them to comprehend new knowledge within a second. This is how their civilization evolves and 'upgrades'."

Hearing Celine's explanation, Roland suddenly understood what Kabradhabi had meant. Human beings did upgrade, but it was not through an artifact of an old civilization but through teaching and learning, the most traditional means of communication. As a time traveler, Roland connected the two worlds.

"If that's really the case, doesn't it mean the legacy shard is continuously recording every arena of our life?" Wendy said as she glanced at the secret chamber on the other side of the hall apprehensively, where the demon was.

"We have to obtain a legacy shard to know if this is really the case," Agatha replied while shaking her head. "If the demons did learn how to create hosts, we'll face a lot of new challenges." She then turned Roland apologetically and said, "I'm sorry, Your Majesty. I'm afraid the years of war experience that the Union gained probably won't help you much now."

"Don't mention it. The third Battle of Divine Will will be an entirely new experience for the demons," comforted Roland. Although the future remained uncertain, he must stay resolute and continue to take the lead. "If technologies could be upgraded, we could also learn from those civilizations who lost their legacy shards, right?"

"Exactly," Celine responded heartily. "This is we members of the Quest Society are obligated to do."

# Chapter 1188: Post-war Analysis

---

In the next couple of days, Roland received various reports from the General Staff that re-examined and concluded the entire investigation on Torch Action based on Summer's reconstruction and the search of Taquila. These reports arrived at Roland's desk like a fierce blizzard, which piled up as high as his waist.

Truth gradually resurfaced.

Roland learned that the giant God's Stone, discovered during the Battle of the Northbound Slope and the Battle of Taquila, was from the God's stone mine at the Taquila ruin. At the bottom of the mine, the Detective Group had found the missing part of the stone, which were two medium-sized God's Stone pillars that was chopped in half. The surface and edge of the cuts were smooth and even, as though the pillars were sliced by a sharp weapon.

Summer could not use her ability in the vicinity of the God's stones, but Roland deduced that the stones might have something to do with the Giant Skeletons. In fact, the Giant Skeletons were not only the transportation tool but also the small Obelisk that could regenerate the Red Mist. His theory was also supported by the corrupted soil around the ruin. Nevertheless, compared to an Obelisk of a normal size that could spread Red Mist up to hundreds of kilometers, the Skeletons could only cover an area within the radius of a hundred to two hundred meters. Moreover, they also required the Red Mist supply line to sustain themselves and spread the Red Mist.

In other words, the Giant Skeletons were the mobile sentry posts for the demons that had significant strategic implementation. The General Staff had reached to the conclusion that these Giant Skeletons, like the Spider Demons, were a rare species; otherwise, the demons would have used them as their sentries and taken the entire Fertile Plains before human beings could take any action.

Furthermore, the passages at the rear of Taquila were mostly the masterpiece of the Spider Demons. Although the Spider Demons were not as efficient as the devouring worms in excavation, they were much more proficient than the Mad Demons. These passages branched out from the God's mine underneath the ground, and the measurement between the surface and the passages clearly showed the Spider Demons consideration of the threshold that an observer type can see. Therefore, it would be difficult for anyone to spot the passages from above.

Since Celine and Agatha both preferred to view the Giant Skeletons and the Spider Demons as one particular type of demon, Roland came up with a new name. He called them Monstrous Beast to distinguish carrier demons from regular demons. A prefix was used to quickly classify an undiscovered type of demon in the same category.

The Giant Skeleton was thus given the name "Fortress-like Monstrous Beast", and the Spider Demons got the name "Spidery Monstrous Beast". The latter was further classified into two subcategories, which the ones that tossed stone needles was the first type and the ones that ejected demons was the second type. The naming system not only facilitated military operation but also simplified post-war data collection and statistical reports.

Apart from a post-war analysis, Roland was also concerned about the weaknesses of the First Army that had been pointed out by the General Staff.

Among other weaknesses, the biggest problem, as Edith had reported, was intelligence collection.

Based on the war history of the mankind, tunnel warfare was never a regular military tactic due to the limitation in technologies and the considerable amount of time and resources it usually cost. However, with the application of the devouring worms and the Spidery Monstrous Beast, military strategies using large-scale tunnels became possible. The demons could create an underground

passage wide enough for their army to pass through within a short period of time. Therefore, the space below also became a treacherous area that the First Army must remain vigilant about.

Beyond a doubt, they needed someone other than Sylvie as a lookout. The Eye of Magic required a considerable amount of magic power to look through solid objects. The area it could cover was no larger than the size of two football pitches, and it could only see through three to four meters below the surface. However, if it was monitoring the area above the ground, the Eye of Magic could see anywhere within ten kilometers and stay vigilant for the entire day.

All the witches, except Extraordinaries, had a limit in their power. When they exceeded their own limit, their power would drop significantly. Therefore, witches rarely went over limits unless it was an absolute emergency.

Considering this factor, the First Army must develop their own intelligence collection system.

Roland remembered there had been a war in the history where both parties had listened closely underground to gather information on the location of the tunnels and camps of their opponents. The devices they used in that battle were pretty similar to a doctor's stethophone, which detected movements through the transmission of sound through solid materials.

However, this method only worked for tunnels in progress. For completed tunnels, one would not be able to hear anything.

After much deliberation, Roland finally found a practical way to infiltrate the enemy: a standard penetration test.

Penetration test was a standard procedure to test soil strength. As a former engineering student, Roland had often heard his roommates discussing this method. Basically, the procedure of this test was to drive steel rods arrayed in quincuncial piles into the ground, with each piles several meters apart. With a sounding

machine, a few people could complete the test over a large area. If the rod sank, then it provided an indication of a hollow beneath the ground.

If the army mastered these two detection methods, they could monitor the demons' movement underground without the help from the witches.

In order for the army to conduct scouting mission in the sky without relying on Lightning and Maggie, the only way was to build an air force.

To that, Tilly was the key.

In addition, Edith's report pointed out that "the army lacks a contingency plan to provide immediate assistance". Roland was impressed with the remarkable progress of the ability of the General Staff, yet at the same time, Edith's comment left him a little helpless. He knew exactly what their problems were, but it was hard to overcome these drawbacks at this stage due to the limited population in Neverwinter.

Finally, Roland's attention was drawn to a report from a logistics officer. In the report, the officer wrote that the performance of Mark I machine gun was not satisfactory during intense battles. Many soldiers from the machine gun squad complained that they spent more time loading than firing, and at the same time, it created quite a burden on the logistics team. The officer expressed his wish that the Department of Engineering could make improvements accordingly.

This was indeed Roland's first time receiving feedback from soldiers at the front after the implementation of the feedback system. As they were the ones who actually used the weapons, they knew the strengths and weaknesses of each weapon better than anyone else.

In fact, Roland had noticed an unusual increase in broken guns after the night attack at Tower Station No. 1. However, since they

easily replace the gun parts, Roland had not taken this issue seriously. He believed that the increase in disabled firearms was largely due to soldiers' inexperience and increasing attacks from the enemy. As soldiers were usually more stressed in a night battle as they could not see the firing results, they might experience difficulty in pulling triggers. Moreover, as air-cooled barrels were inherently less durable than water-cooled ones, the guns got overheated more easily.

This problem alarmed Roland. Initially, he had intended to create a recoil-operated machine gun that employed an air-cooled barrel so that one gun can do it all. He also believed this multi-purpose gun would be more efficient than Maxim gun. However, it appeared that his invention did not work out. Although with the help of tracers and the experience soldiers would gain from night battles, they would encounter much more demons in the upcoming war. Roland could not bear the consequence of broken machine guns during the official Battle of Divine Will when thousands of demons charged at them.

This report made him realize his mistake.

The remedy of this problem was to abandon the idea of multitasking machine guns by separating HMGs and general machine guns. The barrel of the HMG should be lengthened and equipped with a radiator. As for the general machine gun that could be carried by hand or vehicle, it should be lightweight and portable so as to meet the needs of future warfares, and it can be done so by improving the current model of Mark I.

# Chapter 1189: The Radiation Project

---

In addition to a post-war analysis, the General Staff also drafted a preliminary plan for the third Battle of Divine Will.

Although the demons' intention remained unknown, one thing was certain — they would not abandon Taquila under any circumstances. Taquila was the important barrier that could stop the demons from flooding over the Fertile Plains, and it was also the foundation for Neverwinter's army to advance. As long as mankind had control over Taquila, the Red Mist could not easily approach the northwest of Graycastle.

Therefore, it was very necessary to rebuild the Holy City that had been deserted for hundreds of years.

If the demons still planned to breach Graycastle from the Fertile Plains, the First Army would need to strengthen the defense of the railway, protect the railway, and cut their Red Mist supply. The general strategy should be similar to the Torch Campaign. It would be extremely difficult, but if they succeeded, humanity would be one step closer to the final victory.

In short, they had to put all their blood and sweat into this battle.

The problem lay in the Kingdom of Wolfheart and the Kingdom of Everwinter in the northeast.

If the demons, on the contrary, planned to invade the Four Kingdoms from the ridge of the continent, they would then face an extremely difficult war. The Kingdom of Wolfheart was located in mountainous areas, whereas the Kingdom of Everwinter did not have a single river. In addition, the Kingdom of Dawn and two mountain ranges rest right between them. It was impossible to extend the railway to the north of the continent under such a tight timeline, for there were two major technical difficulties that Roland found impossible to overcome: digging tunnel and building bridge.

It was also out of the question to rely on local nobles to assist with logistics. The implementation of the immigration policy would definitely deteriorate the relationship between Graycastle and the two countries. Roland could only hope that the two kingdoms will not stab him in the back. As such, the First Army had to figure out a way to maintain logistics by themselves.

It appeared they had no choice but to use ships as the means of transportation. The problem of this method, however, was that most port cities were located on the east coastline which was very far from the defensive line. There would be where to run if the enemies attacked. It would be fine if they could fight off the enemies, but if they don't, the consequences would be devastating.

Apart from logistics, the First Army also had to ward off the demons and evacuate the civilians. Unlike the boundless, bleak Fertile Plains, there would be so many unknown variables fighting in a foreign country. In consideration of these factors, the General Staff only mentioned that there was a possibility to carry out the battle in the north but did not draft any specific plans. Roland noticed dark circles underneath Edith's eyes as she entered the meeting room.

It seemed that Edith became even more determined to gain the victory after being deceived by Usrook.

Roland put down the report and sighed deeply.

He hoped that the demons could start the war in the Fertile Plains, but before receiving confirmations from Lightning and Maggie, he could not make judgements based on his personal preference. There was no point in guessing what choice the demons would make. He would rather spend more time thinking about how to win the battle more efficiently from his side than dwelling on something he currently had no clue of.

With this thought, Roland rose to his feet.

"Your Majesty?" Nightingale asked with dried fish between her



teeth.

"Let's go to the new laboratory," Roland said slowly. "We need to check out how the Radiation Project goes."

...

In the laboratory at the North Slope in Neverwinter.

"Lady Anna — "

Anna immediately interrupted Lucia White, "I told you. Please don't call me Lady Anna."

"Yes... but I can't help. You're the queen," Lucia said while sticking out her tongue and put down the metal piece in her hand. "Here is the material you asked for. If there's nothing for me to do, then I'll..."

"Even though I'm the queen, you are still my partner," Anna said as she walked up to Lucia with a smile. "Are you going to the new laboratory?"

Lucia nodded and said, "Yes, it's about time."

"Then off you go. Take care," Anna said while walking Lucia to the door. "Please come to see me if you exhaust your power or anytime you are free."

"I will!" Lucia promised as she waved and headed down the hill.

Lucia assisted with all kinds of work. She had to visit the chemistry laboratory, the Furnace Area at the mine, and the laboratory at the North Slope. Before the new laboratory was built, she had not got assigned a fixed workplace. Most of the time, she stayed at the North Slope with Anna to help her produce high-quality alloys and slice metal ingots into delicate parts according to Anna's instructions. This process made Lucia very contented with what she was doing.

It was probably because she was making a contribution to make this world a better place.

Lucia had come to Neverwinter to cure her sister's demonic plague. She had never expected to settle down in this city. At first, Lucia had felt guilty to receive so much help from others with nothing to return. But now, she could also do something to assist Lady Anna and the Chief Alchemist in improving this booming city. Gradually, she felt more confident and had more pride.

The more Lucia knew about Anna, the more she admired her. It was inconceivable that a witch could make such great changes to a city. Lucia was impressed with Anna's breadth of knowledge, her talent, and her dedication to the work. Nightingale was the person she trusted most, and Anna was the witch she wanted to become.

And now, Lucia found an opportunity.

After His Majesty built a brand new laboratory on the southern bank of Redwater River, she had her own workplace. According to His Majesty, her project could possibly change the fate of the entire human race. If the project was successful, she would become the most crucial person in the Battle of Divine Will.

Lucia couldn't help but skipped her way to the laboratory as she thought of her career prospect that would potentially lead her to fulfill her ambition.

She crossed the Redriver bridge and paved down toward the south for another several hundred meters until she reached a lofty wall. Unlike those busy plants located between the industrial zone and farmlands, this laboratory was quiet. The trees next to the pavement cast shades on the ground. It was already fall, but the canopy of leaves above her was still verdant green. Occasionally, the tweets of birds, with which silence teemed, pass through the foliage, highlighting the serendipity of the laboratory.

Overall, it looked more like a residential area than a laboratory.

However, the fully equipped sentries who stood beside the gate indicated that this was not an ordinary residence.

When Lucia came into the front yard, the soldiers saluted and opened the door.

This was only the first security checkpoint.

The building was more heavily guarded as Lucia passed through different section of the yards that was being separated by walls. Everyone had to show their identification before entering the building under the escort of guards. There were few exceptions.

Lucia was one of the exceptions.

She smiled at the soldiers, passed through numerous security checkpoints, and finally stopped before a white brick edifice.

The building was very similar to an ordinary residential building, its external walls smothered in creepers. There was a golden plate hung next to the door, which read —

"Research Institute of High Energy Physics of Neverwinter".

# Chapter 1190: " An Important Task"

---

Lucia neither understood what high energy physics meant, nor did she know what her work will be, but she noticed that His Majesty would always pace up and down in front of this plate, as though the words on it contained some miraculous power.

Because of this, Lucia became even more enthusiastic about her work.

What she was doing in the laboratory was actually not much different from what she used to do in the Furnace Area. However, she had an instinctive feeling that this must be something extraordinary.

"Hey, you're here," Azima, who had been resting in her chair with her eyes shut, sat up and greeted Lucia as she entered the inner yard.

"Good, good afternoon," Lucia replied politely.

"It's so warm and comfortable in here that it makes you easily fall asleep," Azima yawned as she stretched her body. "So, shall we begin?"

"Sure. Thank you for your help."

Azima waved her hands and said, "Don't mention it. I'm your assistant, so I'm obligated to follow your instructions. We've worked together for a while, so we don't need to be so formal. Plus..."

Azima's voice tailed away, her mumble voice carried to Lucia by the warm wind. "There's nothing to complain about when you could earn two gold royals every month just by sitting here."

Lucia stifled her laughter. Truth be told, she was a little afraid of Azima, as she had also heard from Wendy about the internal conflict on the Sleeping Island. This red-haired witch with sharp facial features was the leader of her clique, and she did talk and act

in a trenchant manner with the air of haughtiness. Therefore, when King Roland had appointed Azima as her assistant, Lucia had been quite unnerved, doubting if she was competent to be the superintendent of this new research institute.

Nevertheless, after working with Azima for several months, Lucia found Azima was not as scary as she had thought. Although she did occasionally complain about Princess Tilly, and sometimes even about His Majesty, overall, Azima was a dutiful and hard-working assistant. She was also very sensitive about her salaries and often blurted out some random comments such as "I'll prove myself", "Just you wait, Nightingale", and "I can support myself perfectly", which Lucia found quite amusing.

"Alright then. Let's begin," Lucia said as she opened her closet and handed Azima a white protection clothing."

The first step was to create a barrier between themselves and the external environment. Not only were they forbidden to touch the subject of their research, but they also had to breathe through a special filter as well. Roland had specifically stressed that the purified research material was highly toxic. A tiny little amount would be sufficient to kill anyone who touched or inhaled it. To prevent such unfortunate events, Roland required the researchers to check each other's clothing, especially the parts they could not check by themselves, before proceeding with the research.

After they pulled on the radiation suit, Azima gave a thumbs-up.

Then, the pair went into an open yard.

The ground was neatly lined up with tons of green slabs. Except that they have a darker color, they looked almost the same as the bricks produced at the Furnace Area.

However, these bricks were exceptionally heavy as though they were out of metal instead of stone.

Lucia picked up one slab and applied her magic power to it. The

slab was a bit hot after basking in the sunlight for a long time, but the high temperature did not affect her use of power. She could see the slab in her hand turn into a mixture of colorful compounds, some of which were glinting. However, the material required by Roland only took up a very small portion of the mixture, which sprinkled on the surface of the slab like specks of ink.

Nevertheless, this was much better than extracting the material directly from ores at the North Slope.

Slowly, those color blocks began to move, reassembled, and finally converted into four separate larger blocks. The largest color block was disposed of. The other three blocks were all in different sizes. The smallest of them, which was only the size of an individual salt particle, was the silver, toxic material that Roland required.

Lucia put the material into a glass jar gently and set it aside.

The other two metal blocks were much larger, one of them was the size of an almond, and the other one was the size of a half of a nail. They were also silver, so the only way to separate them was through magic. The bigger of the two was sent to Anna in a basket for further processing, which was later used to test the new machine she was working on. The smaller one was placed in a lead box, and a new box would be used once the first one reached five kilograms.

It would take Lucia two to three days to extract so many metal blocks if she didn't have other schedule. As these slabs were all building materials used by the radiation clan, they had already been purified earlier. Compared to raw ores, these slabs were much easier to work with.

Lucia rose and opened up her hands to Azima after she finished one slab.

This was also one of the rules set out by Roland. Azima had to confirm that there was no particle residue at the scene or on

Lucia's clothes before Lucia could work on a new slab. Azima could detect even the slightest trace of the material with her ability.

Around two hours later, Lucia exhausted her power.

"Let's call it a day," Azima said as she helped Lucia to stand. "We have to study in the evening. If you shut down now, we'll have to carry you back to the castle."

"Yeah," Lucia assented with a nod. "You're... right."

Not only did Lucia feel tired, but she also felt stuffy in her radiation suit. There was no point in continuing to work in such an uncomfortable condition.

The two girls took off their clothes and had a shower. It was around dusk, and they could hear the creepers outside the window rustling as a cool breeze blew upon their cheeks. Lucia heaved a deep sigh, feeling refreshed.

Just then, a familiar voice came from behind, "You did a great job."

Lucia turned around and saw Roland walked into the yard with a smile, followed by Nightingale who had two blue bottles of Chaos Drinks in her hand.

"This is — " Azima stammered, a little surprised.

"This is a reward only for you. Don't tell anyone," Roland said secretly while spreading out his hands.

"Th-thank you," Azima said as she stiffly took the bottle.

Lucia had couldn't wait but pried open the lid.

As the refreshing beverage traveled through her throat, she had forgotten all about the work and her great ambition.

After both of them drained the bottles, Roland asked, "So how's it going?"

"I've separated them as you instructed," Lucia replied as she led

Roland into a room and opened a cabinet. There were dozens of neatly arranged lead boxes in there.



# Chapter 1191: Rare Element

---

Roland picked up a lead box and weighed the silver metal on his hand. Before it was activated, it was no different from ordinary iron. The metal was harmless as long as you did not consume it. It was inconceivable that this piece of metal contained an immense amount of energy that did not really fit its small and innocent appearance.

However, this was the very element that enabled men to convert mass energy for the first time.

This was on a whole new level compared to chemical reactions.

There were roughly fifty lead boxes in the cabinet, each containing one kilogram of Uranium-235 that was almost purified, which added up to fifty kilograms in total.

And there were more than one such cabinet in the room.

If he activated all the uranium in this room together...

Then he would probably release real "high energy".

"Can they really produce what you call 'the Glory of the Sun'?" Nightingale asked curiously. "Will they really explode upon ignition? It seems to me that they aren't combustible at all."

"Do you want to know?" Roland said in amusement. "It's much simpler than you thought. We just need to put these metal ingots together, and they'll explode as bright as the sun. The uranium in this one single cabinet will be more than enough to raze Neverwinter to the ground. That's why Lucia has a great responsibility. If she accidentally —"

The room suddenly fell into a dread silence.

Lucia covered her hand to her mouth, looking terrified.

"... There's no way." At long last, Azima spoke in sheer disbelief, "Are you saying that we might wreck the whole city if we're

careless?"

Hearing these words, Nightingale immediately snatched the lead box from Roland, put it back to the cabinet, and attempted to drag him out of the room.

"Oi... wait, what are you doing?"

"Isn't that obvious?" Nightingale said desperately. "I'm getting you out of this city and ask people to get rid of these things! Lucia, call Wendy to contact the Administrative Office right now!"

"I... I'll go see Princess Tilly," Azima said. "Only she could mobilize the Sleeping Spell to take action."

"Stop! I was just joking — " Roland yelled.

It took him quite a while to calm everyone down.

"Are you sure this is just a joke?" Nightingale grunted.

"Ahem, yes... this is just a theory," Roland added quickly. "It's not that simple to activate these elements. I can't guarantee that it'll be successful to be honest even if I use all my power."

Lucia heaved a sigh of relief and said, "Your Majesty... you scared the hell out of me."

"This isn't funny," Nightingale said accusingly as she glared at Roland. "If Wendy and Scroll heard this, whether this is a joke or not — "

"They would probably move the new institute to somewhere far away from Neverwinter, right?" Roland sighed.

"I'm glad you know that, or they'll probably just get you far away from."

"Alright then. Let's just forget about this conversation..." Roland said after clearing his throat. "As long as you all keep this to yourself, Wendy and Scroll will never know."

"But someone might already hear it," Nightingale said casually as

she looked out the window.

"Then I will reward you one bottle of Chaos Drinks to cut off any information," Roland negotiated immediately.

"Deal," Nightingale said and disappeared from their sight.

Looking at goggling Lucia and Azima, Roland said with a shrug, "Er... never mind that. It is also a part of the joke."

Seconds later, Nightingale reappeared and reported, "No suspicious figures were found, but the deal — "

"Remains valid."

Finally satisfied, Nightingale ate her precious dried fish while humming.

"Well... Your Majesty," Azima said gravely after a moment of hesitation. "It wasn't all a joke, was it? Because you said earlier that we must weigh the material accurately. Each lead box has to be precisely four kilograms. You also stressed that we need to weigh the material with the container together to make sure that the metal in each box has exactly the same weight." Azima paused for a second and continued, "Also, you told us that we should ask the guards to block off the surrounding area in the event of a break in or an accident before coming to see you in the castle. You said we must not investigate on our own, which shows that... these metal pieces are indeed kind of dangerous, right?"

Mildly surprised, Roland replied, "You're quite observant. Yes, most of your inference is correct. Apart from its toxicity, weight is also another crucial factor. That's why I asked you to separate them." Roland was impressed with Azima's meticulous attention to detail. She could deduce the property of the research subject based on the research protocol. Probably that was how she had developed her tracking ability. "However, if we want to turn them into a weapon against the demons, we also need another thing."

"Are you referring to those particles we stored separately?" Azima

asked immediately.

"Not quite, but you are almost correct."

The composition of raw uranium was very complicated. Apart from uranium compounds, there were also many other radioactive materials, most of which were secondary daughter products that either had lost their radioactivity and become a stable atomic element, or they were elements that were still in the process of radioactive decay. Although the radiation clan had purified ores when they had built the Temple of the Cursed, the composition of these raw materials had not changed much, and this is shown by Lucia's result.

Uranium 238 had the highest percentage among other elements. Although it could not be used to produce weapons, it could be recognized by the Magic Ceremony Cube, and it had very similar properties to Uranium 235, so they were all sent to the laboratory at the North Slope.

Uranium-235 with a purity of more than 90% could be used as a weapon. It only accounted for 1% of natural uranium found in the Earth's crust. Therefore, the biggest problem for most researchers was how to extract it.

However, Uranium 235 was not the rarest element on Earth. Its daughter products, such as thorium, radium, radon, and polonium, were even rarer. In fact, Roland also needed polonium-210, the common isotope that could be found in nature, for his Radiation Project.

Roland had received nine-year compulsory education in his previous world, so he knew very well about radium and polonium. Maria Curie made her fame through the discovery of these two elements. Despite the fact that polonium-210 only had a short half-life of a hundred days with an extremely small concentration, Maria Curie had still successfully discovered it from the mineral pitchblende based on its powerful radioactivity.

Both radium and polonium could be used to produce neutron sources, and this led to the second problem: detonation.

The first generation of nuclear weapons was pretty simple. Basically, the mechanism was to let fissionable nuclides release energy. Take uranium-235 for example. When uranium-235 received a neutron, it was activated and became unstable uranium-236 that further splitted into two lighter nuclides and several isolated neutrons. The change in the mass of nuclides was thus converted to energy.

The released neutrons thus hit the nuclides again, initiating subsequent fissions, and released greater energy. Such a series of fissions was what people normally referred to as the nuclear chain reaction.

In the microscopic world, atomic nuclei were wide apart from each other. If an atom was a football field, then the nucleus was as small as an ant in the middle of the field. To make sure that the nucleus was hit, the football field had to be large enough so that the neutrons would not fly out of range. Also, this ant had to be also placed on the path of the neutrons.

To adjust the size of this football field, they had to adjust the mass and shape of the nuclides.

In fact, critical mass was not a fixed number. It also depended on the shape of the nuclides and a series of complex calculations. Apparently, it was easier to hit the ant when the football field was stacked up than when it was arrayed in a line. Roland had heard a miserable defeat in a war because of miscalculations. Nevertheless, as his predecessors had done the complicated and tedious research for him, Roland did not need to start from scratch and perform tons of experiments. He already knew that spheres had the smallest critical mass, and that for uranium-235, its critical mass was fifty two kilograms.

That was the reason he insisted that each lead box should be no

more than one kilogram.

Since critical mass was adjustable, Roland could, theoretically, reduce the critical mass by shrinking the size of the football field or providing more neutrons. High-explosive bombs were actually created using the former method. When the explosion occurred, its reactants were squeezed. The density of the bomb thus exceeded its limit. However, due to the limitation in the current technologies in Neverwinter, Roland did not think he could calculate the correct critical mass to precisely control the explosion. As such, he directed his attention to the latter method.

To use neutrons and maintain a sustained and controlled nuclear reaction.

# Chapter 1192: A Wind Chaser

---

Neutron sources, which could be classified as catalyst, provided extra neutrons that could sustain the chain reaction even when Uranium-235 was under its critical mass.

Technically, both polonium and radium separated from natural uranium could form compounds with beryllium to serve as neutron sources. Roland did not foresee any technical difficulties, for polonium could release a large number of neutrons when colliding with alpha particles. All of the three elements were existing in nature, which saved them a lot of time to create elements artificially.

Roland preferred polonium to radium purely out of safety concerns. Although polonium-210 had a short half-life, it released very few photons upon a decay, which meant it was no more dangerous than inactive uranium. However, radium, which released radon and photons upon activation, posed a potential safety hazard. As such, polonium was a better candidate to provide neutrons.

Further, beryllium could reflect neutrons and further increased the possibility for neutrons to interact with other elements. By combining polonium and beryllium, along with a sufficient amount of uranium-235, even the simplest gun model could be lethal.

In addition to that, beryllium was a common element in emeralds that were quite accessible in the Four Kingdoms, so Azima did not have to search for them in the wilderness.

Roland knew very well about Neverwinter's current level of technology. The principle of the Resplendent Radiation was simple, but to significantly improve the utilization rate of energy from 1% to 90%, it required tons of theoretical calculations and numerous tests. If the conversion rate was low, he would not be

able to reduce the size of the weapons and would thus waste precious uranium resources. Fortunately, Lucia's ability minimized the loss arising from the uranium extraction.

Nevertheless, even with a minimal loss, creating a nuclear weapon from scratch still involved various advanced technologies. Nuclear weapons' destructive power was phenomenal compared to regular explosives. Even 1% of uranium could release unparalleled energy.

Roland had to make every effort to win this battle that would decide the fate of the mankind.

To held the power of the Sun in your palms in this uncivilized era, wasn't it a type of romance?

He would like to give it a shot no matter how impossible it seemed.

"Very well, keep up the good work," Roland said as he patted Lucia on the head. "Once all the cabinets are filled with lead boxes, we can start on the tests."

"Yes, Your Majesty," Lucia said fervently.

\*\*\*\*\*

In the meantime, in the Aerial Knight Academy of Neverwinter.

The area to the west of the research institute was quite today, for all the students were on a break visiting their families, except for Good.

"Upwind, gear down!"

"Crosswind, roll over!"

Good seated himself in front of the mock flight deck, practicing according to the instructions in the Flight Manual by changing the setting of the wind directions. The wooden rod creaked like a battered, weathered watermill. The air in the training room was sultry and balmy. His back was dampened with perspiration, and



sweat dripped down his chin on the shabby deck.

Gradually, his hand became so wet that he could not keep a tight grip on the lever. Good thus stopped and heaved a deep sigh.

After learning to fly for almost half a year, Good had engraved the basic instructions in the Flight Manual written by Princess Tilly in his memories. He was no longer that lay man who got easily flustered by the movements of the plane. Now, Good had memorized all the instructions and developed quick reflexes. His body would react almost automatically to his mind.

But Good doubted if he could really fly a plane.

He could not envision the picture where he actually maneuvered a plane against the wind by himself. The Manual suggested that he should "feel the wind force and wind direction, sense the movement of the aircraft and operate the plane accordingly". However, he did not understand what kind of feeling that was. The mock flight deck remained motionless all the same no matter how he shifted the gear, as though it were laughing at his futile attempts with an air of derision.

The more Good practiced, the more frustrated he became.

While he was feeling extremely discouraged, the door of the training room was suddenly flung open.

"Oho, you're really here."

"Told you. I was right, wasn't I?"

Good looked around, and very surprisingly, saw two men step into the room, who were none other than his team members, Finkin and Hinds.

"Not having fun during your break?" Finkin whistled. "Well, that's because fun is right here in the school."

"Why are you still here. You have a sister, don't you?" Hinds rejoined as he flung his arm around Good's neck. "She asked me to

tell you that you should take a good rest. That's... so sweet of her."

Good's manner tightened. He asked sternly, "Hold on, did you guys visit my place?"

"Of course, otherwise where should we go find you?" Finkin said matter-of-factly, his brows raised. "Her name is Rachel, right? Do you mind introducing her to me?"

"Out of the question," Good retorted fiercely while shooting Finkin a cold glance.

"Aren't we good enough?" Finkin said indignantly. "I have a proper house near Redwater River!"

Good lapsed into a thoughtful silence and then shook his head. "No, it has nothing to do with you. My sister... Rachel has her own problem. I don't think she would like to be with you."

"Why? I think she's sweet," Hinds asked in confusion.

"Come. Spit it out," Finkin urged in curiosity.

"Drop it," Good replied gruffly. "Let's talk about something else. What did you mean by 'fun is here in the school?'"

Finkin did not insist but lowered his voice and replied fugitively, "Do you want to fly a real plane?"

Astonished, Good said, "What did you say?"

"I saw it a few days ago when I climbed over the wall," Finkin said with a triumphant smile. "There are new planes in the hangar. Although they're covered with canvas, I could see they're about the same size of the 'Unicorn' piloted by Princess Tilly. In other words, those are our planes!"

"A few days ago? Why didn't you tell us back then?"

"Because I don't want you to be too excited and blabber about it," Finkin said while shrugging. "We're on a break, so few people are in the academy. That gives us a great chance to have a peek at them!"

"Are you mental?" Good said in disbelief. "Without permission, nobody is allowed to get in there!"

"Surely those soldiers won't let you in," Finkin said while rolling his eyes at Good. "So we must take another route and go around the airport."

"But..."

"We're just taking a look," Hinds egged on. "You should have noticed that Princess Tilly looks sulky recently and is more strict with us. So it would probably be another two months before we could actually fly them. Don't you want to know what our planes look like, or you actually prefer this stupid wooden deck?"

"If you don't come with us, we'll go without you," Finkin said as he winked at Good.

Good stared at the rickety wooden rod while savoring the sense of loss that lingered upon his heart. After what seemed to be a long internal struggle, Good bit his lip and agreed with a nod, "Alright. I'll come. Show me the way."

## Chapter 1193: A Wind Chaser (II)

---

The academy was empty just as Finkin had said. The three thus passed through various buildings and stopped in front of a towering wall.

"This is..."

"This is the west side of the airport," Finkin said as he brought a wooden ladder and erect it against the wall. "Follow me."

Good hesitated for a moment before he climbed up the ladder. The moment he reached the top of the wall, an involuntary exclamation escaped from his lips. A swollen red sun was sinking low over the water. The glittery ocean splintered into flecks of gold in the sweltering sunset, and the sky was awash with sheets of blue and yellow. Layers of cloud sloped down to the horizon, below which was the vast emptiness of the airport that would potentially lead them to the sky.

Sea breezes dispelled the irritation that smote upon Good's heart. He closed his eyes and, with his arms stretched, imagined himself clasping on the operation lever while waiting to take off.

"A very nice view, eh?" Finkin said while grinning. "I found this fabulous peeping spot. Just be careful not to fall off the wall."

Hinds asked behind them, "So... what next?"

"Naturally we should go there, but we have to take the ladder with us." Finkin said as he pointed at the hangar not far away. They first saw the "Seagull" parked out there. The hangar was actually not very far from them as its edge was only about two meters away from the wall.

Because of the intense balance training they had received, they could now easily walk along the top of the wall, and reached their destination within fifteen minutes.

The hangar was two to three meters taller than the wall, so they

could not clamber onto the roof. However, its windows and the wall were on the same level, so they could peep through the windowpanes while stretching themselves up on their tiptoes.

"Covered planes... covered planes... I saw them!" Finkin yelled.

Good's eyes followed Finkin's, and his chest constricted.

There were four uncovered biplanes in one of the hangars. Good's eyes were glued to their smooth and elegant bodies. His heart swelled with excitement as the knowledge that he would one day operate them struck him.

Who cared about knights? They were nothing next to an aerial knight who could fly in the sky!

Finkin placed the ladder against the window and clapped his hands smugly. "Well, we didn't step into the airport, so technically, we aren't breaking the rules."

Good knew that was a pretty tenuous argument, but he could not help crawling into the hangar through the window.

To his surprise, for the first time since his training, Good felt calm.

After they landed, Finkin and Hinds rushed to the closest plane while Good sauntered behind them.

"Whoa, this is... spectacular!" Hinds apostrophized as he touched the plane. "It's metal."

"Yes, and it's as thin as skin. Look — " Finkin agreed as he pressed his fingers on it, and a dent immediately appeared on the surface. "I wonder how they made it."

"Oi, take it easy. You don't want to break it."

"Don't worry. It's quite bouncy."

"Really? Let me try..."

Good did not marvel at the plane like his two friends. Instead, he

crawled into it as if led by a mysterious force and proceeded to the front of the aircraft.

According to the illustration on the cover of the Flight Manual, this was the exact spot Princess Tilly was sitting at while soaring above the continent and the sea.

Good thus sat in the pilot seat.

So this was the world in an aerial knight's eyes.

The wings above and the carriage on both sides obscured half of his vision, which forced Good to look straight ahead. He could even smell the leather chair. The flight instruments were encased in clear glass. Both the operation lever and the pedals were made of metal, the top part of the lever was wrapped in soft fabrics that afforded a nice, comfortable touch.

Good grabbed the lever and geared down. The lever creaked.

Unlike the wooden lever he had been practicing with, Good did feel he was pulling something. The quivering steel string and the increasingly heavy lever told him that the sensation was real.

"Good Lord, what are you doing?" Hinds' voice cracked through the air like a whip that jerked Good out of his musings.

"Er..." Good stammered and instantly relinquishing his grip. "I'm just..."

"Practicing?" Finkin jeered. "Who said we were mental earlier? Now who has sneaked into the cockpit? Didn't we agree to just take a look?"

"Sorry, I couldn't help..."

"Rest assured," Finkin interrupted. "I don't think you'll break it because we're told to do so during the training. But be fast. I want to try it out too."

"Hang on," Good said, a little reluctant. "I just geared down. Do you want to sit in the backseat first?"

"And what about me?" Hinds protested as he climbed up the wing.

While they were fighting for the seat, there was suddenly a screech of an open lock.

Good's face turned white with great trepidation.

Terrified, Hinds said, "Why... why would they come here at this time?"

"What should we do?"

Finkin was the only one who seemed to be composed. He said, "We don't have time to run. Hide first!"

However, there was not a single hiding place in the large hangar, and the pilot seat was too small for three grown-up men. Before they could get off the plane, someone had already arrived.

"Who's there?"

"Freeze!"

With several clicks, Good found himself surrounded by the First Army.

Petrified, the three were soon pinned to the ground.

"What happened?" a voice came as they saw a familiar figure approach them. It was none other than Princess Tilly Wimbledon. "Invaders?"

Finkin shouted in exasperation before the guards could supply an answer, "Your Highness, we're sorry. We are all students at the Aerial Knight Academy. Out of curiosity, we came here to have a look at the planes. Please have mercy on us!"

Apparently, Finkin also knew that they were not supposed to be here. Good had a feeling that they were in big trouble.

After hearing the full account, Princess Tilly nodded expressionlessly and said, "I see. According to the school rules,

you'll all receive detention of at least 15 days and be disqualified from becoming an aerial knight. You can choose what you want to be in the future between a busboy and ground staff. Let your officer know."

"As, as you command..." Finkin and Hinds replied while screwing up their faces.

Good's heart sank to the bottom. Suddenly, courage seared through him as the guards began to shuffle them out. He raised his head and shouted in earnest, "Your Highness, please! I want to be a pilot. I would do anything if you could spare me this time! I'm at a loss in the training sessions, so I came here to feel the actual thing, not only out of curiosity!"

"Really?" Tilly said, her brows raised. "Are you referring to... a feeling?"

"Yes, my actions didn't coordinate with the instructions in the manual. Although I was flying, I couldn't sense the wind... Well, that isn't quite accurate. It's something..." Good explained as he tried to find a proper word to describe his feeling. "I can't put it into words. I only know that I didn't feel it right..."

"He's blabbering. It's all nonsense."

"Is this guy crazy?"

"Get him out of here. He annoys Princess Tilly."

The guards conversed with each other.

Tilly took a searching look at Good and said, "You're Good, right? Eagle Face told me that you're doing pretty well in all subjects. You were the first to get used to the training and are also very hard-working."

"I..."

Tilly cut across him haughtily, "So what do you think of riding on a plane?"



"Huh?" Good said, flabberghasted.

"Didn't you say you needed to feel it? So what now? Do you think you could fly?"

Good hesitated for a second, his hands clenched, and replied, "Your Highness... I think I can."

"Then try it out," Tilly said as she turned around without looking at him. "In fact, I'm planning to train you guys on a real plane tomorrow. For other students, they're allowed to fail but you aren't. If you fail, I'll expel you. Of course, you could also choose to be punished. That's up to you."

"I want to fly," Good replied decidedly.

"Very well," Tilly said. "I'll also let the other two choose what way they want to go."

# Chapter 1194: The Only Request

---

After dinner, Tilly told Roland what had happened at the airport.

"Because of... a feeling?" Roland said, a little surprised at the reason Tilly had changed her mind.

"What? Not a good reason for you?" Tilly said while folding her arms.

"Well, you made all the school rules for the Aerial Knight Academy, so you're the boss," Roland denied while waving his hand. "I'm just curious about what that feeling refers to."

"It means talent. You really don't know anything about flying," Tilly said while shrugging. "For ordinary people, they simply follow the instructions in the manual mechanically, but some people could visualize their action. These people could foresee the result of their actions beforehand."

"Er... that sounds really amazing," Roland commented indifferently while twitching his lips. He admitted that he had no knowledge of flying. If it was not for Tilly, he would probably never be able to train so many aerial knights. Tilly helped him a lot to build, test, improve, and finalize the plane and train new pilots. Normally, it would take a few decades to build an actual plane based on the blueprints collected from the Dream World and apply it to militaray operations. Having said that, a plane was essentially a machine. Wouldn't it be enough to follow the instructions and keep practicing if someone wanted to learn how to operate it?

"Because I have that talent too," Tilly said regretfully. "The fact that you can't visualize it means that you don't have the talent. If you were a student of the Aerial Knight Academy, you would probably be knocked out of the school, brother."

"Ahem..." Roland almost choked as he heard Nightingale stifle her laugh behind him.

"Are you under the impression that we could be pilots as long as we practice?" Tilly said as though seeing the thought in Roland's mind. "It's true that some people could develop reflexes after numerous practices, but being able to feel is also a talent, although it's not as fast as the former method. Most people probably would never develop such an ability. Flying would be the most they could achieve. Between the two, who do you think will have a higher chance of surviving a battle?"

Roland fell silent.

Without a doubt, the gifted ones would have a better chance. They normally learned much faster than ordinary people, as they possessed the ability to learn from their experience. However, common people could barely survive. In other words, it took talented students less time to learn and absorb new knowledge.

"But that's not always the case," Roland said after a short pause. "Maybe he was just lucky and happened to have the right answer."

"So that was why I asked him to fly," Tilly said casually.

"... What about the other two?"

"They chose to fly too."

"Really?" Roland said while blinking in surprise. "I'm impressed with their bravery. Don't you think it's a pity to expel them?" Being expelled from school was a severe punishment, especially when this particular school was managed by the princess. This meant the expelled students would have a record, and it would be a lot harder for them to seek other employment in the future. Busboys and ground staff were actually paid well, and they were relatively stable jobs. The academy also offered them medical and housing benefits.

There were less than 200 pilot trainees in Neverwinter, so Roland cherished every one of them.

"The Aerial Knight Academy doesn't need untalented students.

Bravery would only lead them to an early death. It's better for them to leave now than later," Tilly said in a low voice.

There was a strained silence. Roland got two drinks for both of them, and Tilly changed the subject. "By the way, I came here for my new plane. Any update on that?"

Roland's heart skipped a beat. He knew Tilly must have some important business to discuss. "I think we should take this matter slow. We need you to build the air force. You'll pose a greater threat to the demons if you stay in Neverwinter — "

Tilly did not respond but her eyes were glistening with inflexible determination.

Roland breathed out a deep sigh.

Tilly was not referring to the "Unicorn" but a more powerful military aircraft. After Tilly had cried hysterically in his chest like a defenseless child that night over Ashes' death, she had told Roland the next morning that she wanted a plane that could kill the demons.

She was going to seek revenge.

Apparently, Roland's evasive promise had not changed Tilly's mind.

"Are you sure that's what you want?"

"You weren't so indecisive when you planned to ambush Ursrook."

"That's because logistics is completely different from fighting at the front."

"Not really. In both cases, I use my ability for those in need," Tilly denied while shaking her head. "It was I who agreed to send Ashes to the front. You know very well that aerial knights won't stand a chance to win against the demons in the sky. There are too many demons and the aerial knights are too weak. Only I could change

the situation."

"But the academy..."

"I certainly will fulfill my responsibilities. I'll train some qualified instructors so that they could further expand the academy." Tilly paused for a second, her eyes fixed on Roland, and said slowly, "I know I'm being selfish, but this is my only request."

Roland gazed into Tilly's eyes. At long last, he sighed, "I see."

Tilly unclenched her fist and said, "Thank you."

"By the way, any specific requirement on the color of the aircraft?" Roland asked when Tilly was about to leave.

Tilly stopped, a little perplexed, and answered, "No, not really..."

"Then how about red?"

"Does it make any difference?"

"Normally, the party that dominates the sky is in that color," Roland explained gently.

"Really?" Tilly said while curling up her lips. "Then red it is."

After Tilly took her leave, Nightingale said to Roland, "Her Highness is... serious this time."

Roland replied while massaging his forehead, "That's what troubles me." When Tilly said "this is my only request", Roland sensed her perseverance and eagerness behind her words. Roland understood no other person except him could help Tilly avenge Ashes. If he had turned Tilly down, her hope would turn into poignant despair, and dimly, he had a presentiment of losing her.

"She's also changed," Nightingale remarked. "But I understand her. If it was you — " Nightingale broke off and shook the idea off. "No, I can't even imagine it."

Roland fell silent. He suddenly realized that a war could alter many people and things, but the war itself would continue to bring

destruction.

To prevent tragedies like this, there was no way other than ending this Battle of Divine Will as soon as possible.

# Chapter 1195: Things I Want to Do

---

Good could not even remember how he get back to his residence.

By the time he arrived at his house, it was around nightfall, and everyone was on their way back home. Smoke curled up from the chimneys, and he could hear people greet their families. The air was soaked with sweet aroma of porridge and the salty odor of sweat. The neighborhood was so lively and energetic that nobody would believe that this place was actually a residential area for refugees.

Good could smell the hope that empowered the energy and liveliness of the refugees. Residents here would be well fed as long as they worked hard. Within half a month, people could afford eggs and pork. Everyone was hopeful about their future, with their voice confident and their spirit high. Although the residential area was untidy and raucous, it was by no means dismal and miserable like a slum.

Everything here was colorful.

Except Good.

As he saw his neighbors smiled at him broadly, his eyes started streaming, and a scathing voice kept ringing around his ears, "Look at what you did, you thickhead. You ruined everything!"

Had he not been so headstrong to request a trial from Princess Tilly but instead accepted the punishment, he would have still been a student of the Aerial Knight Academy. Even if he could not become a pilot, he could still have a decent job in the future, much better than being homeless.

His courage had soon ebbed away after Princess Tilly had agreed with his proposal. Now, he only felt fear and despair.

If he failed, he would lose everything.

Good pushed open the door and entered as he was crestfallen.

A silvery voice greeted him brightly, "Good, you're home. See what I made for you."

Rachel ran up to him in excitement and settled him in his chair. She uncovered the lid of the plate and pronounced triumphantly, "Tada — egg pancakes! Looks good, eh?"

The so-called egg pancake was divided into two layers. It looked more like a pancake topped with scrambled egg than an egg pancake. Nevertheless, it still looked delicious. Its egg white thin, and its golden rim slightly furled, with an orange yolk right in the middle while yolk was still runny. The melted butter trickled down to the plate, giving off a rich and devilish smell.

Obviously, Rachel had put a lot of efforts into this meal.

Stunned for a split second, Good said, "You bought eggs?" Eggs were not particularly expensive in Neverwinter, but we still could not afford to have them everyday.

"Yes," Rachel said as she handed Good a wooden fork. "Uncle Bucky took me to the marketplace today. Don't worry. I still have savings. You rarely have a break, so it's okay to have eggs occasionally. Plus, once you become an aerial knight, we'll soon have more savings. I already thought this through!" Rachel patted her chest in confidence.

Good took the fork stiffly and mumbled, "Y-yes, you're right."

"Now, eat it and see if you like it," Rachel urged.

After a moment of hesitation, Good slowly put a morsel of the egg pancake in his mouth. Instantly, the flavor of the yolk mingled with the butter permeated his entire mouth.

Memories started to flow out from the deepest part of his mind.

He and Rachel had suffered a lot on the way from the Kingdom of Wolfheart to the Western Region of Graycastle. In the past, he would have never dreamed of having such tasty food. However, things turned better miraculously after they arrived at



Neverwinter. They were fed and clothed in this city, and probably, in the near future, Rachel could eat this "egg pancake" every day, only if he continued to study at school.

Good did yearn to soar the sky, but was it really worth him to bet with his life?

He had nothing to lose before, but it was different now.

Good had to take care of Rachel.

Then why did he make such a selfish choice?

He had never thought of Rachel when he had agreed with Finkin to take a look at the planes.

He could not forgive himself for being so selfish!

"Do you like it? It shouldn't be... that bad, right? I haven't cooked for a while, and I'm not sure whether my cooking skills have got rusty or not," Rachel said with uncertainty. "Oi, say something. Is it okay? Hang on, why are you crying? Is the food that bad?"

"No..." Good replied, his face glazed with tears, as he gulped down the pancake. "It's good, really good. I'm just... I couldn't help..."

Startled, Rachel walked up to him, patted his head and asked quietly, "Did something happen?"

"I'm sorry... I probably couldn't continue to study in the academy..."

Good then told Rachel everything.

"I see," Rachel said at length. "I just have one question for you. Do you... like flying?"

"I — " Good broke off, groping for words that did not come. He found it hard to lie in front of Rachel's face, so he nodded.

"Then there is nothing to worry about," Rachel smiled. "This is your first time finding something you like, right? You've done so much for me on our way here. I asked you to leave the Kingdom of

Wolfheart, and you could have refused, but you still did. So how can you be a selfish person?"

"But I..."

"The worst scenario is to start all over again, right?" Rachel suggested with her head tilted on one side. "And I'm literate. Even if I don't... well, I could find jobs by myself. So, just do your best."

"R-really?"

"Anyway, you don't have time to regret. It's better to think about how to pass the trial than worrying about our future. Just make sure to keep your temper next time."

Good stared at Rachel for quite a while until he said, "Sometimes, I feel you know much more about the world than me."

"I'm older than you, so naturally I know more. You insisted me to be your younger sister, remember?" Rachel mumbled and smiled at Good. "If you're expelled, then let's switch it up. I'll be your elder sister."

...

The next day, in the airport for the aerial knights.

Sixteen students stood out in a line at the end of the runway. As these students passed the exam first, they got the chance to have the trial first.

Four brand new planes gradually glided over the runway and came to halt in front of them.

Mumurs instantly swept over the crowd. Everybody was studying attentively at the four beautiful machines with great interest.

Except Finkin and Hinds whose face was screwed up.

Good closed his eyes.

He felt the cool breeze blowing at his face, trying to revisit his training, memorize the instructions of the officer, and visualize

each move. Gradually, a blur of images showed up in his mind.

When Princess Tilly appeared, everybody kneeled down on their knees. Finkin tugged Good's sleeve to remind him.

"Your Royal Highness!"

"Rise," Tilly said expressionlessly. "It's your first time seeing these new planes, but you should have been familiar with them by now. All the materials in the textbook are based on the 'Unicorn', and these planes are the upgraded versions of the 'Unicorn', so they function better. Therefore, as long as you follow the instructions received in your training, you should be able to pass the trial. Considering it's your first time flying a plane, I'll sit you through the process and supervise you. I'll also mark your performance. Of course, I would rather you not needing my instructions."

Tilly paused for a second and went on, "However, in consideration of possible errors you would make in this test, I invited Miss Nana here. As long as you don't die on the spot, you'll survive, but it also means that you'll get a really low mark. If you can't improve yourself in the subsequent training, you'll be expelled. So, I hope you'll do your best. Also, if the plane sustains substantial damage, you'll get a zero mark because we don't have enough planes for you to crash. Understand?"

"Yes, Your Highness!" the sixteen students chorused.

"Now, let's begin. First examinant, Good." Tilly announced solemnly.

Good took a deep breath, walked up to the plane, and crawled into the cabin.

# Chapter 1196: The Reason to Fly

---

A soldier started the plane and turned on the valve. The aircraft immediately started to shake violently, the engine began to roar, and the propeller spun at a tremendous speed.

When the roar turned into a steady buzz, Good slowly pushed the gas lever, and the plane, as if being pulled by an invisible force, started to slide on the runway.

"Wow..." the crowd exclaimed impressively.

Good felt greatly encouraged, as he had not expected that it would really work. He was now truly operating this giant steel beast!

Good turned his head toward Princess Tilly who was sitting on the left side of the wing, her gray hair streaming behind her, a twinge of smile in her eyes. Was the princess... content with his performance? Good became more confident, believing he should have no problem passing this trial as long as he followed Tilly's instructions.

However, the princess did not say anything.

Good cast glances at Tilly numerous times, but Tilly was determined to maintain her silence, with faint yet playful smile lingering on her lips. When the plane crossed halfway through the runway, Good suddenly came to the realization that he would probably not receive any instructions during the entire trial.

"Considering it's your first time flying a plane, I'll walk you through the process one step at a time."

Princess Tilly's promise did not apply to him who had broken the school rules.

The other students would have a second chance, but he would not.

His enthusiasm was instantly quenched by a surge of disappointment and regret.

"If you don't make me say anything, then it definately would be your best performance."

Good somehow comprehended what Her Highness had meant. If he could not fly the plane all by himself, he would be expelled, which was a price he had to pay for breaking the rules. If he proved his talent to the princess, then he would have some value for further education.

Could he really fly the plane on his own?

Now he had already used up two thirds of the distance, and a patch of grass gradually swam into his view, followed by the wall that encircled the airport. If he ran directly into the wall, even Miss Nana would not be able to save him.

There's no time.

Good wanted to pull back the gas lever, as this seemed to be the only way to slow down the plane and avoid a direct clash.

However, the next moment, he felt a hand pat on his head.

"Do you like... flying?"

Rachel's voice reverberated next to his ears.

Flying...

Yes, if he were a bird, there should be another way.

Which was to fly over the wall.

If he slowed down now, his journey would end here.

It was a second that contained eternity. Good grasped the lever and pushed it forward.

The engine instantly roared like thunder.

The wall streaked toward him!

Good jerked the plane up ten meters in front of the wall. As the plane shook violently, the runway sank below him and slid out of his sight. The patch of grass flitted below him. For a moment, Good felt weightless. The ground plummeted as he soared into the air!

"Faster! A little faster!" Good's eyes widened as the top of the wall pressed in. He was ready to embrace the crash.

But the crash never happened.

It shot up into the sky. All the obstacles in front of him disappeared, and Good saw a view he had never beheld. The academy, the coastline, and Neverwinter far away spun below him, his mind clearer and his heart lightened as the truth of operating a plane dawned on him.

Good wanted to whoop.

It was so wonderful that human beings could finally fly.

...

After he landed, Good knelt down before Princess Tilly.

"Thank you for giving me this opportunity. I saw something that could only exist in my dream."

During the trial that had lasted half an hour, Good had completed the basic flight maneuvers, including climbs and hovering, although with some difficulties.

There was nothing more he could do about his marks.

Even if he failed, the memory of this flight would be engraved in his heart. From now on, whenever he closed his eyes, he would remember this unique experience.

"Why did you join the Aerial Knight Academy?"

Tilly's voice came from above.

Good hesitated for a moment before he replied truthfully, "Your

Highness, at first I just wanted to earn some income. Later, I wanted to be a successful man. Now, I've fallen in love with flying."

"I can give you money and fame, and also offer you a pilot job, provided that you promise to kill as many demons as you can," Tilly said coolly. "Fight for Graycastle and kill every demon that comes into your view. You have to exchange everything I give you with their blood. This is the duty of an aerial knight, the purpose of building this school. If you could do that, then report to Eagle Face."

Good looked up in excitement and said, "Your Highness, do you mean — "

"You passed," Tilly said and whipped around without looking back.

The trial did not end until 5:00 in the afternoon. Two out of sixteen were knocked out.

Finkin and Hinds also passed the trial.

After the students were dispersed, Finkin and Hinds grabbed Good by the arm, pulled him next to them and said, "Are you mental? Princess Tilly told us we only needed to take off and land properly to pass. Not only did you almost run into the wall, but you also flew out of the academy and hovered above the sea. Weren't you afraid that you would crash the plane?"

"That was an accident," Good thought to himself while rolling his eyes, then he said, "Didn't Her Highness say that all of us should do our best? I didn't know that you just need to take off and land to get a pass. I thought a few more moves would boost my mark."

"You lucky dog," Finkin said while shaking his head.

"You guys did well, too." Good said while twitching his lips. "You took off so well without instructions."

"What? What do you mean by 'without instructions'? Didn't Her

Highness tell you when to pull the lever?"

"Yeah, but she gave fewer instructions to us than the other students," Hinds assented, "because we're wrong-doers."

Good was rooted to the ground. Was he the only person who did not receive any instructions?

While confused, the three of them returned to their dormitory.

An icy Eagle Face was waiting for them there.

The three shuddered. The trainees were actually afraid of their instructor more than Princess Tilly. They were constantly under the impression of being X-rayed under Eagle Face's piercing scrutiny.

"S-sir..."

"I'm very impressed. I didn't expect that you could make trouble even on your break," he said as he surveyed Good, Finkin and Hinds coldly. "Princess Tilly has told me everything. You're very lucky not to be expelled. Well, this isn't the jurisdiction of the First Army, otherwise..."

"S-sir, we're sorry!" the three immediately apologized in earnest.

"Since Her Highness has already punished you, I won't inflict more punishment. However, if you become an aerial knight, you'll become a member of the army," Eagle Face jeered. "To make sure you won't make the same mistake again, you'll have to clean the washroom for the whole month coming next. You got it?"

"What..." Both Finkin and Hinds screwed up their faces.

Only Good administered a salute.

"As you command, sir!"



# Chapter 1197: The Torch of the Civilization

---

The trial that had lasted a week not only indicated that the students at the Aerial Knight Academy had taken the first crucial step but also marked the official beginning of their training program. The trial, as a matter of fact, had stirred the entire city.

Several citizens spied a "giant kite" hover above the southern part of the city. Although Tilly often flew the "Unicorn" around the castle, most of the time she confined her activity to depopulated areas . As such, the public had never truly witnessed a real plane.

Onlookers rushed toward the southern city, hoping to catch a glimpse of the plane when it darted out of the yard. In the beginning, only residents at the Shallow Port and the industrial area knew about the trial. Nevertheless, within three days, the news was spread out throughout the entire city, and the academy was besieged by curious spectators. Whenever a plane slid into their view, the crowd erupted a loud cheer as if it were them riding the plane.

Honey took advantage of this opportunity and soon published an article entitled "A Recurring Miracle", detailing the trial for the pilot trainees. The article was supplemented with two close-up shots of the biplane, which immediately brought the sales of Graycastle Weekly to a new peak.

Many merchants beyond Neverwinter sniffed a business opportunity and started to purchase the papers at a high price from the locals after they were sold out. Those who were not financially capable of doing that hired people to copy the article and the photos. Such a movement further raised the paper price in the city.

Aerial Knights, therefore, were known to everybody in Neverwinter overnight.

Roland received Tilly's report a week later.

150 out of the 197 trainees passed the trial, which meant that 47 students crashed the plane due to major errors. As there were only four planes used in the trial, each plane crashed around 11 times on average.

It appeared that the crashing rate was pretty high, but Roland understood that the plane was lightweight and had a simple structure. As long as the engine remained intact, it was easy to fix them. Most of the crashes, as Roland noticed, had occurred during the process of landing due to speeding or slow operation. Roland was certain with a little bit of repair here and there, the biplane would recover its splendor.

Of course, the refurbished planes would obviously not function as well as the mint ones. In fact, two planes were so battered that they could no longer satisfy the need of the students. To make sure that the students received adequate training, at least 12 to 15 biplanes were required for the subsequent advanced training program.

This was also the number required for a large fleet in his previous world.

Roland concluded that the whole reported only conveyed one piece of information: "The air force and I need funds, and you shall give me money."

Roland put down the report in amusement. He had to admit that Tilly did have some talent, for she had already grasped the nature of the air force when it was still in its infancy. In fact, a competent fleet not only required manpower but also a large number of planes for training purposes.

At present, all the industries in Neverwinter were severely short staffed. Apparently, they could not build an air force in a short period of time.

Apart from Tilly, Edith Kant, the Chief of the General Staff, also handed him a report.

The report was short but quite interesting.

Edith believed that the aerial knights had a potential to change the situation of the war and would even play a decisive role in the outcome of the battle, provided that they were properly used. Therefore, she wished to establish a research committee and send them to the academy to learn more about the planes for future strategic studies. She also conceived a few tactics specifically for the aerial knights, which she wished to discuss in detail with Roland at the earliest.

Edith was probably one of the few executives who truly cared about the planes. Roland admired her remarkable perspicacity and the ability to quickly associate the planes with potential war practices.

While Roland was planning to summon Edith to discuss aerial knights, his guard reported, "Your Majesty, the Minister of Construction, Sir Karl Van Bate, wishes to see you."

Roland withdrew his hand from the telephone and said, "Send him in."

"Yes, Your Majesty."

"Your Majesty," Karl saluted as he entered the office. "The construction of the Miracle Building is completed."

...

Roland marveled at the towering building as he stared up at it from the bottom.

It took them two years to build this magnificent edifice. The construction cost them tons of gold royals and a large amount of steel and concrete that was more than enough to build three Redriver Bridges. Thanks to Lotus, Hummingbird and the other witches, they managed to complete the construction with relatively little manpower and few resources.

Contracting an expensive habit of squandering national

resources and developing an addiction to extravagant architecture would definitely weaken national power. However, the impact this building brought upon civilians was also phenomenal, which could be evidenced by the reaction of the spectators.

The striking contrast between the two or three-story residential buildings and the Miracle Building that stood 50 to 60 meters tall exhilarated Roland.

As Neverwinter's new landmark, the Miracle Building not only astonished the masses with its ineffable grandeur but it was also a manifestation of the most advanced technologies currently available in this era. For example, its drainage system was comprised of various water tanks at different levels to ensure that water could be drawn efficiently.

Further, four outdoor "elevators", driven by the steam engines at the basement, could transport dozens of people at a time between different floors. Although the elevators were quite rudimentary compared to modern ones and they required attendants to manually control the operation, they were unprecedented in this era. Passengers could have a birdview of the city through the french windows installed to the elevators.

"Your Majesty, please say something," Karl suggested while placing his hand on his chest after they reached the podium. "Your subjects are waiting for you."

Roland nodded and waved at the thousands of heads below.

A tidal wave of cheers swept over him.

"Good afternoon, my subjects."

"This is the day when the Miracle Building is officially open to the public. It's a building that sets numerous world records. Today will be remembered by our descendents. However, I'm not dwelling on its degree of magnificence but on what you're most concerned about, that is, who will be living here and for whom it

was built."

"Is it nobles? No, Graycastle has stripped nobles of their power. Is it the royal family? Of course not. I don't need such a large building to place my bed. The answer is simple. This building is for the residents in Neverwinter, that is, you all."

"You built the Miracle Building and are therefore entitled to this miracle!"

"Every room in this building will be listed for sale. You don't have to be a noble to buy. Just bring your identification card, and you'll become a resident of this building that is destined to be a part of our history!"

As soon as Roland finished, another wave of cheers flooded over him.

"Long live the king!"

"Long live Neverwinter!"

After the chorus died down, Roland continued, "Now, let's ignite the torch at the top of the building. From today onwards, this torch will be lit every night and dazzle the whole city!"

In the deafening roar, Roland and some officials of the City Hall entered the elevator and climbed to the top floor.

A huge stone basin was placed at the center of the roof, brimming with black oil. This thick heavy oil, which had been specifically processed beforehand, had a long lasting power. It would not emit a foul odour or produce smog either. Therefore, it was the optimal fuel for a long-burning flame torch.

"Your Majesty," Nightingale said as she handed Roland the torch.

Roland nodded, took the torch and ambled over to the basin.

He suddenly remembered a song he had once listened to, its familiar lyrics came floating out of his memories.

"The moment there was the first sign of life underwater... you've

come a long way..."

A smile curled Roland's lip, and he ignited the torch.

This was the flame of the human civilization, and he hoped that it would burn forever.

# Chapter 1198: A Foreigner

---

At the Sedimentation Bay in the Kingdom of Wolfheart.

As one of the two port cities in the Kingdom of Wolfheart, the dock here was always busy. Merchants from the interior loaded and unloaded their ships before they set off for their next undertaking from this harbor. Alternatively, they traded their commodities with local marine tradesmen. As such, the dock area was essentially a big marketplace where all kinds of transactions took place, from furs all the way to slaves.

White settled himself in his coach, languishing at the raucous coachmen while gazing upon the ocean.

Ever since the outbreak of the war between Graycastle and Hermes, local churches had stopped sending orphans to the Holy City. Having lost the main source of income, merchants in the Kingdom of Wolfheart struggled to live. What was worse, because of the friction between local lords, peace was not restored after the regime of the church was overthrown. Coachmen like White, being financially unstable, thus had to come to the Sedimentation Bay to seek new employment for a living.

Although the war had also somewhat affected the life in the Sedimentation Bay, the nobility still led their previous extravagant lifestyle. As the passage leading to the Cage Mountain was now under the control of the Token Family, it left other lords no choice but to rely on sea shipping to transport their luxurious goods, which, in a way, sustained the economy here.

Of course, the temporary prosperity was also partially attributed to the fact that the baron in the Sedimentation Bay maintained his neutral position.

This was one of the reasons that White chose to strike root here.

He was old and did not want to wander about anymore.

White planned to carry cargo for a few more times and purchase a property with the money earned before starting his own small business.

"Hey, man, any work for you today?" Suddenly, a young worker clambered onto White's coach and jeered at him.

"Get out of my way. It's none of your business," White said gruffly while waving his hand in the same manner as he dismissed an annoying fly. "Don't you get on my carriage. You can't afford the repair of these beautiful wheels."

"Don't say that. Look at me. I'm tiny. Am I going to crush your wagon?" the young man protested as he patted his stomach and slumped against the compartment. He picked up a straw on the floor, sucked it between his teeth and looked around. "What did you carry last time? Why does it smell so funky in here?"

"Get off, or I'll kick your ass," White grunted. He did not know the young man's name, but all the other workers called him Smarty. White did not see any smartiness in him. To him, this young man was simply an unacquainted coworker.

"Really? With your artificial leg? I bet it hurts on rainy days, doesn't it?" the young man said casually. "It looks like it's going to rain soon. Your joints and bones should be hurting now, right?"

Speechless, White glowered at him, wondering when he had found out his secret.

"Haha, don't stare at me like that. I'm here to help you," Smarty explained while spreading out his hands. "There are so many people looking for work. You're an old man and certainly couldn't compete with young guys."

"What's your point?"

"Very simple. My coworkers will help you get a good spot. Are you interested in collaborating with us?"

"And in return?" White asked.



"A comission of 10%. A good deal, eh?" Smarty said, smiling.

White fell silent. The sky above looked sullen. Sea breezes whipped his clothes, preluding a heavy rain. It was true that his fake leg might hinder him from getting any business from his competitors, and employers would probably not entrust their cargo to a limped laborer.

Hearing no response from him, Smarty snapped his fingers and said, "Well, I take it as a yes?"

"You aren't... just helping me, right?" White asked at length as he stared at him.

"Ahem, if everyone comes to seek me for help, that'll save me a lot of time," Smarty answered evasively. "By the way, can't you switch the straw to cushion? The most popular products in the Sedimentation Bay are the Chaos Drinks from Fjords and perfumes. Although nobles would normally bring their own carriages, you never know what will happen. They would always need a spare carriage. Your wagon is so smelly. Even if I bring business to you, employers probably wouldn't like to hire you..."

White cast a glance at the eloquent young man and finally understood why people called him Smarty. Yet as an aged and experienced man, he had also seen a great deal of life. He thus said, "Did you just ask me what I carried last time?"

"Yes?"

"Cow dung that is used for fuel," he answered slowly. "They were sun-dried, but still it can be wet here and there."

Smarty stiffened. He spat the straw and started to retch.

White grunted triumphantly. A kid was essentially a kid. He rested his eyes back on the ocean and suddenly stood framed to the spot.

Several three-masted ships slowly came into his view, all from the Chambers of Commerce at Fjords, their masts almost 100 feet

tall, their golden flags rimmed with black. He did not know what Chamber of Commerce that was.

Whatever ships they were, White only cared about the cargo on them. With such colossal ships, he was certain he would have some business even without Smarty's help.

White got off his coach and untied his horse. He was about to ride to the dock when Smarty suddenly pulled him from the back.

"Hey... it seems something is wrong there."

White turned around impatiently and started at what he saw.

More masts appeared behind the three main ships, their sails forming a "white wall" over the sea.

"God almighty..."

Those grayish-black ships covered every inch of the ocean. White attempted to make a count but soon abandoned this idea after he saw 50 ships come into his sight. As more and more ships followed, White found it hard to catch up with the count. There were probably 100 or 200 ships in total, and maybe even more!

There were giant three-masted ships but also numerous steaming paddle steamers. White had seen these new boats before, but it was his first time seeing so many of them. He was positive even sailors living at the harbor had not seen such a huge fleet.

All the pedlars, sailors and laborers stopped what they were doing and gazed at the approaching fleet.

The dock suddenly became incredibly quiet.

As the ships drew close, they could now see the flags more clearly. White could barely make out the coat of arms on those flags, which featured a lofty tower and spears. All the flags on those ships bore the same coat of arms. Hundreds of banners streamed against the wind and formed a new horizon that awed the spectators.

Smarty gasped.

"Is it... the Graycastle flag?"

White muttered in disbelief, "Are you saying... that the King of Graycastle came here?"

As the Sedimentation Bay could not accommodate so many large ships, most of the ships lowered their sails outside the harbor while the ten steam-powered boats came straight to the dock area.

As soon as the ships disembarked, a group of uniformed men filed out onto the trestle and the dock area, all as expressionless, frosty and reticent as seasoned soldiers.

White swallowed hard. For some reason, he was afraid of these men whom he had never seen before. White had the impression that all the people on the dock felt the same way. Soon, these foreigners occupied the entire trestle but nobody dared to raise an objection.

White realized that this fleet was not here for trading goods.

The air above the dock became thick and heavy.

The leaden clouds in the sky seemed to be even lower.

# Chapter 1199: The Commotion in the Kingdom of Wolfheart

---

"What damn weather," the baron, Jean Bate, muttered as he stared at the overcast sky by the window. "It's raining again."

It rained a lot in the Sedimentation Bay, particularly in summer and fall. Unexpected storms visited this city often, so the city was equipped with a well-developed drainage system. Unlike the Broken Tooth Castle and Graystone City where roads instantly turned muddy after a heavy rain, the rain here would only affect the cargo transportation. The impact of the weather was indeed minimal to the urban area.

Jean was actually more frustrated about himself than the upcoming rain.

The sky would soon clear out after the shower, but his mood would remain gloomy.

"Sir, have you figured out how to reply to them?" His clerk, Zum, asked gingerly.

"Reply?" the baron sneered. "What would you say if you have to pick between being hanged and being burned?"

"Er..." The clerk fell silent.

"You can't make a choice either, right? So, let's just keep them waiting."

"But..." Zum broke off, trying to formulate a proper answer.

Jean Bate knew very well that playing for time was just a temporary solution. Like the prospective storm that would come no matter merchants liked it or not, he had to solve this problem regardless.

Everything started with the war against the church.

After the fall of the king's city of the Kingdom of Wolfheart, dozens of lords, all of a sudden, claimed that they were the bastards of the King of Wolfheart. These alleged royal blood formed cliques and factions to fight for the throne. After numerous fierce battles, the kingdom was divided into three major territories, each dominated by the Token Family in the northwest, the "Redstone Gate" Family in the south, and the "Tusk" Family in the mountainous area in the east.

Since the Tokens were relatively far from the Sedimentation Bay, they had never come to bother Jean. However, both the Redstone Gate Family and the Tusk Family were trying strenuously to win him over to further expand their territories.

The baron had been taking a neutral position during the war. His disinterest in political gains soon brought huge profits to his city. Since the two dukes relied on the port to transport food and gold royals, and because they had been busy with conquering other surrounding cities and towns, the two families had not extended their power over the Sedimentation Bay as yet.

However, as the expansion progressed, the Tusk and Redstone Gate Families gradually became two of the most competitive candidates for the future sovereign. Since the Tokens suddenly extended a full reign over the Cage Mountain, the Tusk and Redstone thus again rested their eyes on the baron's domain, the Sedimentation Bay.

Jean knew exactly what they aimed at.

They wanted to seize the Sedimentation Bay and banned commercial trades of their opponents as a way to overpower the other. To this end, both dukes sent their ambassadors, along with dozens of knights and mercenaries, in an ostensible attempt to lobby him.

The port was only guarded by a patrol team and several of Jean's own guards. Those guards could cope with savage pirates but

definitely not fully-equipped knights. Jean Bate did not plan to resist. He would pledge alliance to whoever that ascended the throne, and he did not care whether this succeder was the true blood of the late king.

Unfortunately, however, the Redstone Gate and the Tusk Families were powerful in equal measure.

Under such circumstances, he could join neither of them.

Whichever side he picked, he would suffer virulent vengeance from the other party. Losing the right to trade meant they would have to produce food and other military supplies by themselves while the other party would be entitled to a constant supply of resources. Neither of the two families would like to put themselves in such an unfavorable situation.

Therefore, a war would be inevitable.

There was no fortified city wall or deep moat protecting the city, which meant that Jean had to pick a side to defend against the invasion.

However, would the two families support him?

The baron could not take a chance.

Shrewd as the two dukes, they would probably sacrifice the subjects of the Sedimentation Bay to reduce the casualties of their knights and then cut the retreat once their enemy entered the city, for they cared only about the land not the people.

Perhaps, it would be better to abandon the Sedimentation Bay to the two families.

That was why Jean said this was a decision between being hanged and being burned.

Jean sent the two emissary delegations to the same campsite, hoping their acrimony against each other would earn him time to think over the matter. He rather hoped the two parties engaged in

a physical altercation. To this end, Jean had even sent women and strong liquor to inveigle them into fighting, but other than a fierce verbal argument, neither of the two parties made the first move.

"Tick, tick..."

The rain finally pounded against the garden of his mansion, draping a misty curtain between Heaven and earth.

Watching flowers swaying gently in the rain, the baron lapsed into silence. He knew it was not wise to play for time, but he could not think of any other way to get out of this dilemma. His grandfather used to advise him that nobles tended to always waver between interests and power. As long as he took advantage of their indecisiveness, he would never lose. Perhaps, it was time for him to stop playing games but start to think deeper and more strategically.

Just then, a pattering of running footsteps interrupted his thought.

"S-sir, bad news!"

"What's the matter? Now, now, take it easy!" Jean Bate said as he shot the guard a glance. "What happened?" He stared at the guard's quivering lips, hoping to hear words like "knights" or "campsite" that hinted a fight between the two families.

"The fleet of the King, the King of Graycastle took the port. They not only took over the dock but also forbade anyone to approach that area!" The news was so shocking that for a moment, Jean stood rooted to the ground.

"What did you say? Gray, Graycastle?" the baron stammered. "Do they want to sell anything here? Hang on... you said they blocked off the dock?"

"Yes!" the guard blustered frantically. "They drove away the boats around the trestle for their own ships. They say they're going to borrow the port for a while and assure that order will soon be

established. The patrol team attempted to stop them but was immediately disarmed. It's reported that there are hundreds of Graycastle ships outside the harbor!"

Jean Bate asked incredulously, "Are you sure it's the fleet of the King of Graycastle, not any lord?"

"Yes, I saw them through my telescope," the guard replied with some difficulties. "I confirm that the coat of arms on the flags does represent Graycastle. It has a tower and spears."

Jesus, did Graycastle intend to invade the Kingdom of Wolfheart?

Why did Wimbledon not pick his neighbor but him?

Even if the King of Graycastle desired to expand his territory, he did not necessarily have to launch an attack on the sea. Could the Token Family resist the army of Graycastle who had once defeated the church?

No, this did not make sense...

The baron dealt hurriedly with crowding thoughts.

Then his clerk Zum came up to him and whispered something in his ear.

The baron's face lighted up.

Yes, this was what he was exactly waiting for!

The army of Graycastle definitely had the capability to break the deadlock between the two warring families. If this fleet did plan to wage a war here, they would need the help of local nobles no matter how invincible they were. With just a little guidance, they would be able to conquer the entire land. Jean did not have specific preference over any lord, but apparently, the King of Graycastle could offer him more than any of the nobles. Possibly in the near future, he would become a governor of some jurisdiction if he chose to pledge fealty to the King of Graycastle.



Even if Wimbledon failed his attempt, Jean would not lose anything.

Just at that moment, another guard burst in. "Sir, the Graycastle fleet sent an ambassador on behalf of King Roland Wimbledon, who wishes to speak to you."

Jean Bate exchanged a look with the clerk before he said with a nod, "He's our guest. Tell the ambassador that I'll come out to meet him."

# Chapter 1200: The Will of the King of Graycastle

---

"Now?" the guard asked blankly. "Right away?"

"Yes."

Usually, according to common practices of the nobility, he should let the ambassador rest for a few days and welcome him with a sumptuous banquet. At least, he should have set up a meeting time beforehand, possibly at night. After all, the ambassador represented the King of Graycastle, and thus should be treated with formality to some degree.

However, Jean couldn't wait any longer. Had it not been rainy outside, he would have rushed to the dock and met this ambassador himself. Such a huge fleet would definitely draw the attention of the Tusk and the Redstone Gate Families. If either of them got in touch with Graycastle before him, things would become very complicated.

With this thought, Jean Bate said to the guard, "By the way, tell the Graycastle delegation that I'm the sole authority that governs the Sedimentation Bay."

"Yes, sir."

Yet after the guard left at his bidding, Jean suddenly regretted his impulsive action.

He should not have said "right away". What if the ambassador wanted to follow and observe the tradition first then call him a few days later?

Jean blamed his own vanity at the bottom of his heart. He should have been more straightforward.

And why did it rain right as he wanted to go out?

The baron felt miserable.

But surprisingly, the guard returned within an hour and brought him a good news.

"Sir, they're coming."

Jean Bate stood bolt upright and said, "Take them to my parlour immediately."

...

The baron soon met the ambassador from Graycastle.

There were only ten people who came, and half of them were soldiers that were guarding outside the door. The rest were all formally dressed, whom Jean gathered were assistants and clerks. The one in the middle was apparently the ambassador himself. He noticed that the coats they were wearing were waterproof, as all of them were dry despite the pouring rain outside. The material of their coats had a bright, fresh color. It was, however, neither fur nor leather.

It appeared that the rumor which Graycastle did produce many curious items was true.

However, Jean squeezed his eyebrow as he looked on the ambassador. The ambassador was definitely a Mojin by his look. Why could a Mojin, who usually served as a slave here, be a noble in Graycastle?

Even though he was shocked, the baron showed a hearty smile and completely hid his emotions. He spread out his hands and said, "I'm the lord of the Sedimentation Bay. As you can see, this is a beautiful and bustling city, a wonderful place for you to take a rest. May I know what brought you here today?"

The baron was speaking in such a humble courteous manner, and he was confident that even a duke would receive him with some civilities.

But the Mojin remained expressionless. He replied flatly, "My name is Iron Axe, the commander of the First Army and also the

supervisor of this expedition. Let's save the small talk. The Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart will soon become a battlefield. I came here on the order of the King of Graycastle, Chief of the Mojin clan, and ruler of the Fertile Plains, King Roland Wimbledon, to save your all."

"What the heck?"

Jean Bate could not believe what he had just heard, wondering what the Chief meant and where the Fertile Plains was. Was the ambassador making a war threat against the Kingdom of Everwinter and the Kingdom of Wolfheart? Why did he threaten him outright without negotiation?

"Er..."

Instead, it was Zum who replied first, "Is the First Army the army that defeated the church?"

"Yes," Iron Axe affirmed with a nod.

"Sir Iron Axe, we obviously don't want to see a war here, but we can't make the decision on our own. There will always be someone who will attempt to resist. If you could persuade them, then we can avoid this war." Zum retorted.

Jean nodded vigorously, and he was glad that Zum did a good job. In that case, the Redstone Gate and the Tusk had to fight as well. He looked at Iron Axe triumphantly but was surprised to see a hint of sarcasm in Iron Axe's eyes.

Iron Axe said placidly, "You don't have a choice. The entire human race will have to fight when the enemy comes. In fact, this war has already begun in a place you don't know. I think you've heard about some rumors about the church, the Divine Will, and the attack of a foreign race."

Jean Bate gaped. As the lord of the port city, he had indeed heard about such things from marine merchants. However, these groundless rumors could only serve as the subject of public

discussion but not a proper diplomatic topic at the negotiation table. Nonetheless, judging from the ambassador's tone, Jean realized he was serious.

"Yes, these are all true," Iron Axe said slowly and firmly.

Thunders began to roar outside the window.

"Wow, are they all made out of iron?" Smarty asked as he leaned dramatically on the stable fences.

"Even iron will rust. In my opinion, they aren't human," White answered as he wiped the water off the horseback and fumbled his wet clothes. "Will a reasonable person stands in the rain? Only a lunatic will do that."

Within an hour, hundreds of people exited from the ships and took control of the whole harbor. Pedlars were dispersed by the storm, but these men put up tents in the middle of the square. A few moments later, dark green sheds filled half of the dock.

In addition to the tents, Graycastle men also set up tube-shaped obstacles on the crossroad and some higher parts of the road. These metal tubes did not look like weapons, but they glinted in the rain, giving White a queasy feeling in the pit of his stomach.

Each "tube" was guarded by soldiers. Although everyone was wearing a waterproof cloak, it was impossible to stay completely dry in this weather. Gusts of wind were so furious that they sent rushes of rain in every direction. White could envision how water trickled down through those soldiers' collars and soaked their clothes.

It must be awful to stand out there.

The Sedimentation Bay was wet and rainy all year round, so the local lord had built many temporary sheds in the dock area. However, these soldiers took no notice of them. They stood straight in their gleamy cloaks like rocks.

"Men from Graycastle are crazy..." White mumbled to himself.

"Hmm, weird," Smarty muttered.

"What now?" White said gruffly.

"Look at those cargo ships, then look at those outside the harbor," Smarty said. "The ones outside the harbour are three-masted sailing ships, but they're shallow on the draft."

"What's a draft?"

"Just view it as a measurement for the cargo weight," Smarty said dismissively. "Even though these cargo ships have been unloaded, they're still much deeper on the draft than the sailing ships outside. I don't understand. What are the Graycastle men up to? Are they bluffing about their forces?"

"What are you talking about?" White said impatiently.

"My point is... that these ships might be empty!" Smarty replied in a subdued voice.

...

Jean Bate did not pull himself together until Iron Axe finished.

He had just heard about the long, distant history of the wars between humans and demons, that this war took place every four hundred years, and that this time, the demons were very likely to invade the interior from the Impassable Mountain Range!

"Are you... sure?" Jean remembered that the north of the Kingdom of Everwinter was girdled by endless mountains and steep cliffs. How could the demons invade from there?

"No, I'm not sure. That's why I brought my scouts here," Iron Axe said while shrugging. "However, whichever direction the demons come from, it won't make a difference. We have to unite together and defend this continent. Otherwise, mankind will be exterminated."

The baron suddenly had a queer feeling as if he were walking in his dream. He knew his clerk and guards all felt the same way.

"Ahem, alright then. Let's suppose that what you said was all true," Jean said after clearing his throat. "So why did the King of Graycastle send you here? Isn't the Kingdom of Everwinter where you are suppose to be?"

"It is, and don't you worry about that. What we want here is very simple, that is, to save as many people as possible from this war, including freemen, slaves, refugees and vagabonds," Iron Axe paused for a moment and then continued, "except nobles. Nobles shall make their own choices. If you cooperate with the First Army, we'll return your properties, land, titles and so on when we depart. If you try to stop us..."

Jean swallowed.

"You'll be the First Army's enemy," Iron Axe finished his sentence coldly.

# Table of Contents

[Release That Witch](#)

[Synopsis](#)

[Copyright](#)

[Chapter 1101: The Controller of the Forest](#)

[Chapter 1102: The Demons' Blade \(I\)](#)

[Chapter 1103: The Demons' Blade \(II\)](#)

[Chapter 1104: The Demons' Blade \(III\)](#)

[Chapter 1105: Leaf's Heart](#)

[Chapter 1106: A Universal Strategy](#)

[Chapter 1107: Yes! RPG](#)

[Chapter 1108: More than Enough](#)

[Chapter 1109: The Past](#)

[Chapter 1110: A Complete Version of the God's Punishment Warriors](#)

[Chapter 1111: Until Death Do Us Part](#)

[Chapter 1112: The Truth](#)

[Chapter 1113: A Third Wheel](#)

[Chapter 1114: A Return](#)

[Chapter 1115: An Epochal Missile Test](#)

[Chapter 1116: An Underground Laboratory](#)

[Chapter 1117: The Light of the Cursed](#)

[Chapter 1118: Experiment Records](#)

[Chapter 1119: A Real Researcher](#)

[Chapter 1120: A Cape City](#)

[Chapter 1121: The Most Genius Invention](#)

[Chapter 1122: To the Sea](#)

[Chapter 1123: Underground Coffins](#)

[Chapter 1124: A Lair](#)

[Chapter 1125: An Exit](#)

[Chapter 1126: The Status of the War](#)

[Chapter 1127: Preparation for the Final Battle](#)

[Chapter 1128: The "Unicorn"](#)

[Chapter 1129: "The Mysterious Stone"](#)

[Chapter 1130: A Presumption](#)

[Chapter 1131: The Third Academy](#)

[Chapter 1132: The Effect of the Reward](#)

[Chapter 1133: Shadow Tides](#)



[Chapter 1134: Plunge into the Sea](#)  
[Chapter 1135: A Drastic Change](#)  
[Chapter 1136: Sea and Sky](#)  
[Chapter 1137: The Banished Senior Demon](#)  
[Chapter 1138: Interception](#)  
[Chapter 1139: Celine's Request](#)  
[Chapter 1140: Dream World's "Illegal Immigrants"](#)  
[Chapter 1141: Trust and Misunderstanding](#)  
[Chapter 1142: Different Roads Lead to the Same Castle](#)  
[Chapter 1143: The Difference between Martialists](#)  
[Chapter 1144: A Stronger Person](#)  
[Chapter 1145: A Deal and A Strange Phenomenon](#)  
[Chapter 1146: In the Name of Rose](#)  
[Chapter 1147: A Picture Underneath the Sand](#)  
[Chapter 1148: Camilla's Return](#)  
[Chapter 1149: A Challenger under the Sky](#)  
[Chapter 1150: The Ambush Plan \(I\)](#)  
[Chapter 1151: The Ambush Plan \(II\)](#)  
[Chapter 1152: Persuasion](#)  
[Chapter 1153: A Real Monster](#)  
[Chapter 1154: A Repeated Fate](#)  
[Chapter 1155: The Battle of Taquila \(I\)](#)  
[Chapter 1156: The Battle of Taquila \(II\)](#)  
[Chapter 1157: The Battle of Taquila \(III\)](#)  
[Chapter 1158: The Defeat](#)  
[Chapter 1159: The Ambush](#)  
[Chapter 1160: A Trap](#)  
[Chapter 1161: A Slim Hope](#)  
[Chapter 1162: The Last Struggle](#)  
[Chapter 1163: Transcendent](#)  
[Chapter 1164: A Destiny without a Choice](#)  
[Chapter 1165: The Eye of A Storm](#)  
[Chapter 1166: The Victor](#)  
[Chapter 1167: Woe](#)  
[Chapter 1168: Recovery](#)  
[Chapter 1169: A Parliament of Holy See](#)  
[Chapter 1170: A Shocking Statement](#)  
[Chapter 1171: The Double Plan](#)  
[Chapter 1172: A New Population Policy](#)

[Chapter 1173: I Want All of Them](#)  
[Chapter 1174: A Permanent Currency Solution](#)  
[Chapter 1175: Ursrook's Letter](#)  
[Chapter 1176: A \[Flaw\]](#)  
[Chapter 1177: Before the Storm](#)  
[Chapter 1178: Being a Grown-up](#)  
[Chapter 1179: Tri-tank Magic Power Unit](#)  
[Chapter 1180: Rose Café](#)  
[Chapter 1181: The Best Team Combination](#)  
[Chapter 1182: Infiltration](#)  
[Chapter 1183: Sacrifice](#)  
[Chapter 1184: Corruption](#)  
[Chapter 1185: A Warning of Destruction](#)  
[Chapter 1186: Reconstructing the Final Battle](#)  
[Chapter 1187: The So-called Upgrade](#)  
[Chapter 1188: Post-war Analysis](#)  
[Chapter 1189: The Radiation Project](#)  
[Chapter 1190: " An Important Task"](#)  
[Chapter 1191: Rare Element](#)  
[Chapter 1192: A Wind Chaser](#)  
[Chapter 1193: A Wind Chaser \(II\)](#)  
[Chapter 1194: The Only Request](#)  
[Chapter 1195: Things I Want to Do](#)  
[Chapter 1196: The Reason to Fly](#)  
[Chapter 1197: The Torch of the Civilization](#)  
[Chapter 1198: A Foreigner](#)  
[Chapter 1199: The Commotion in the Kingdom of Wolfheart](#)  
[Chapter 1200: The Will of the King of Graycastle](#)